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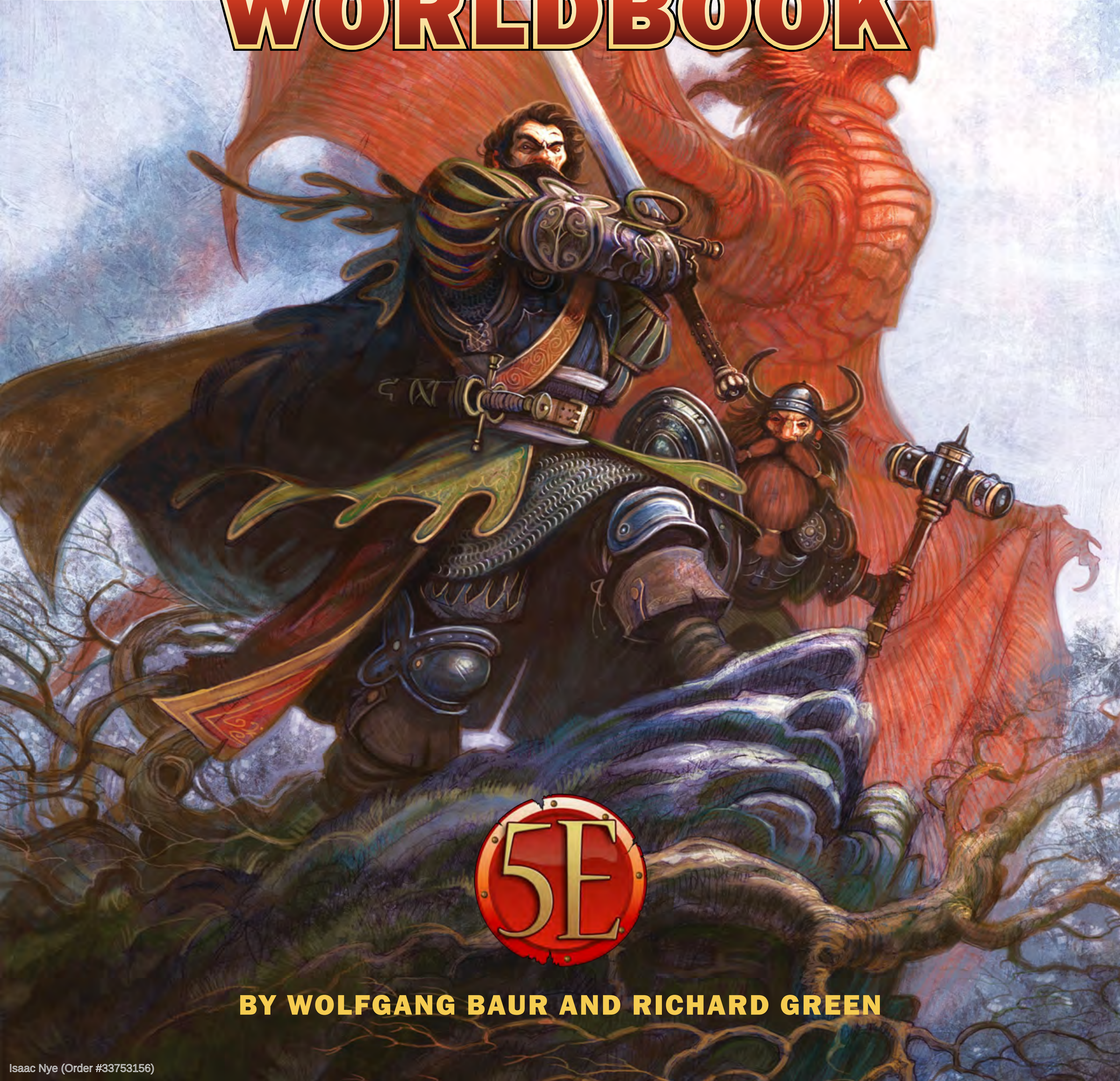
WORLDBOOK



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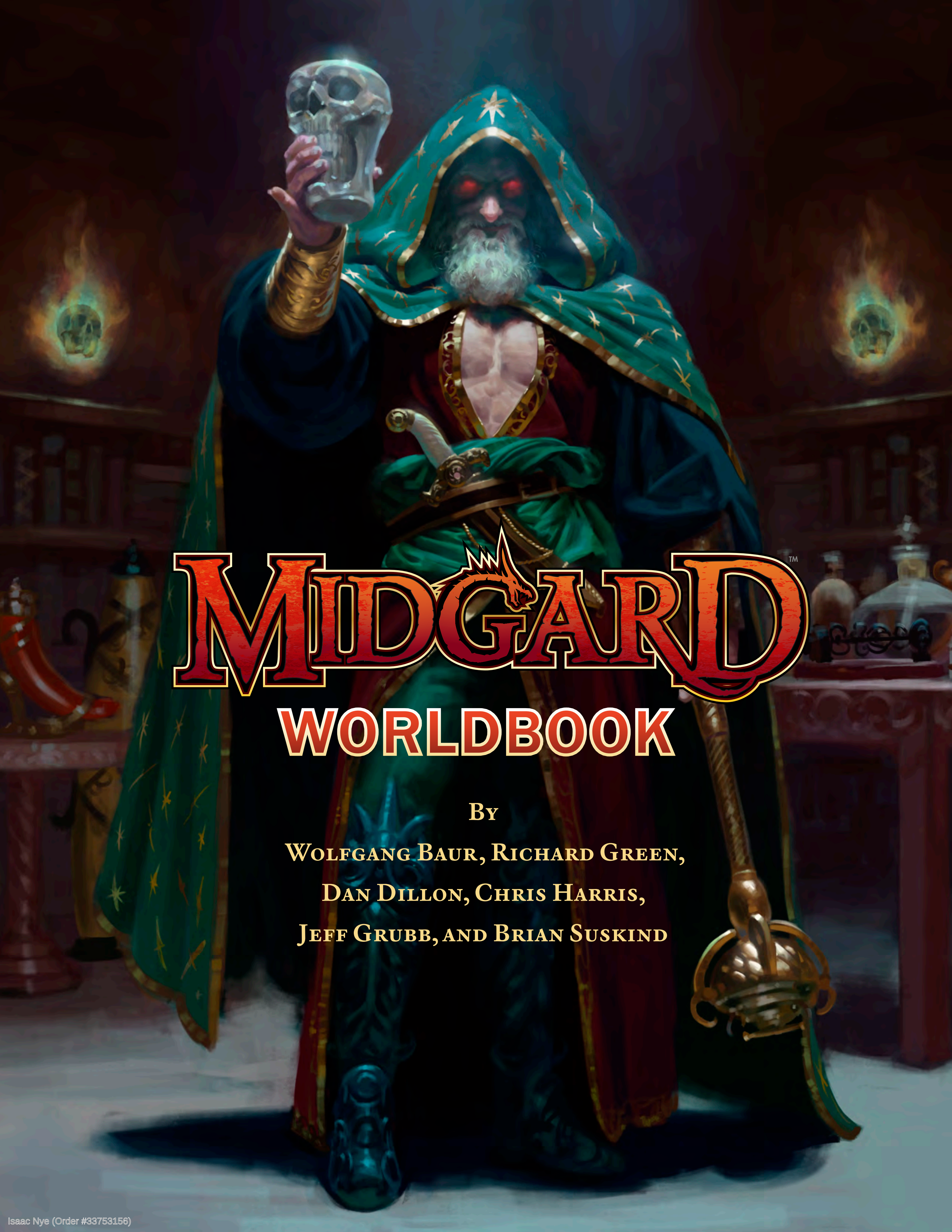
BY WOLFGANG BAUR AND RICHARD GREEN



MIDGARD™

WORLDBOOK

By

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DOOM OF THE FROST RUNES

Hear, O adventurer, of your wyrd and the fate of all those who seek to oppose what is written for them in the blood of dragons: The mortal world of Midgard is a place of heroes, and heroes often fall like glittering coins into the claws of Veles, the first of dragons! Where scales rustle and slide, have a care, lest you enter the halls of Valhalla earlier than you might wish.

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THE COLD

by Wade Rockett

"It's cold," Jiro forced out through chattering teeth. "You said it wouldn't be cold."

Jana Ravovik walked steadily through the blizzard, her pace as precise and measured as the clockwork that powered her. "And I was correct," she said placidly to the kobold struggling through the snowdrifts behind her. "It is not cold."

"You aren't cold because you're made of metal. It's not the same."

"I'm not cold either," said Sated Fang. The darakhul monk sat cross-legged on a boulder atop the rise ahead, waiting for the others to catch up.

"That's because you're dead," Jiro said.

Sated Fang shrugged, dislodging the snow that had piled up on her shoulders. "I could kill you, if you wanted."

"What did you see?" Jana Ravovik asked as they joined their companion.

Sated Fang unfolded herself and hopped lightly down from her perch. "The shrine is unguarded, within and without."

"Did you go inside?" Jiro asked.

"No," Sated Fang said with a smile. "The Blood Vaults taught me not to enter any ancient and foreboding temples until our talented trapsmith says it's safe."

"Flatterer," Jiro grinned. "Hey, at least it was just poison that time."

Jana grasped Sated fang's arm eagerly. "And do a pair of stone-carved ice maidens stand at the door, one on each side? One holding Iwaz, the rune of Wotan, and the other bearing Eiwaz, the rune of Yggdrasil?"

Sated Fang turned to the gearforged oracle. "Just as you saw in your vision," she said. "It's Kaldgate."

Fire kindled in Jana's crystal eyes. "At last," she said. "If Rava wills, we may this day learn what troubles the World Serpent in its sleep, and discover a way to turn back the tide of darkness that threatens the Free City." With that, she took off at a run and vanished over the rise. Jiro stumbled after her, until Sated Fang lifted him onto her shoulders and raced across the snow with a monk's effortless grace and the tireless endurance of the undead.

The shrine was a squat mound of gray stone, dusted with snow, a dark speck against an endless vista of blinding white. A single doorway on its western face offered entry. As the trio drew near, they saw the stone sentries that Sated Fang had described. Jiro glanced at Jana. The oracle, though long accustomed to seeing her visions made real, seemed unnerved at the sight of their impassive faces and blank eyes.

After a moment, he coughed. "Shall I . . . ?"

Jana shook herself. "By all means," she said, with a sweeping gesture at the entryway.

The kobold stepped cautiously forward, his experienced gaze taking in the snow piled around the shrine, the carved statues, the arch of the entryway, and the outside walls of the shrine. At one point he paused and looked doubtfully back the way he'd come, then cast a searching look around at the sky.

"Anything?" Sated Fang called. Jiro shook his head absently, then continued forward until he reached the structure itself. With quick, light movements he traced the stones of the entrance with his long, slender fingers. He regarded the stone floor with narrowed eyes for several minutes before taking his first, cautious step across the threshold. Jana took a step forward, but stopped when Jiro quickly raised a warning hand.

"Just because nothing's tried to kill me yet doesn't mean it's safe," he said. "We've traveled for weeks to get here. You can keep your shirt on for a few more minutes, while I do the job you brought me all this way for."

With that, he vanished into the shrine's dark interior. Jana and Sated Fang waited outside, the gearforged oracle whirring and clacking impatiently while the darakhul monk scanned the hills around them for signs of danger. After half an hour, Jiro's "all clear" whistle sounded from inside and the duo entered the shrine.

Jiro had lit his lantern, and its warm glow filled the shrine's barren interior. Six curved stone benches formed a semicircle within the shrine, all facing a small altar to the Aesir that sat across from the doorway. Above the altar was a window that looked out onto the shimmering rainbow lights of the Northlands.

"Well, that's odd," Sated Fang said.

"Yeah," Jiro said, his eyes gleaming in the lamp's flickering flame. "We didn't see those lights when we were outside."

"Northern magic?"

"You have no idea," said the lights.

There was a long pause. "Hello," Jana said.

The colored lights rippled and formed into a humanoid shape—slender and tall as an elf. It spoke again, its voice high and airy like a wandering tune played on distant pipes. "I will save you a long and undoubtedly awkward explanation," it said. "You three have journeyed from the crossroads of the world, driven by a vision, seeking an answer to a question."

Jana nodded. "Why does the World Serpent stir in its sleep?"

"Also, who are you?" Jiro said. "And what are you doing here?"

"Don't," Sated Fang hissed. "It might be like a djinn, with its wishes. Maybe we only get one question."

The light-creature laughed. "I am Herdogan of the liosalfar, who dwell in the lights over Hyperborea to the far north. I am here to greet you, and give you a message."

"Great, great," Jiro said. "What's that?"

The liosalfar tilted its head and pointed past them toward the entryway. "Follow the cold."

They turned and looked. Outside, the blizzard had intensified; indeed, since they'd come in, the wind had risen to a howling gale. When they turned back, Herdogan was gone.

Sated Fang frowned. "Well," she said. "Those seem like poor directions to me. It is cold in here. It is cold out there. I am sure there are places colder still, but I don't see—"

What the monk did not see would remain a mystery, as she was snatched into the air by a shrieking gust of wind and pulled through the entryway into the blizzard outside. Jiro and Jana rushed after her. Once they were outside, they beheld the strange spectacle of the monk engaged in furious hand-to-hand combat with a snowstorm.

"Thuellai," Jana said darkly. "An evil creature of ice and air, feared throughout the Northlands. I have heard of these monsters: their howls bring madness, and their freezing strike can shatter armor."

"I bet they don't like fire, though," Jiro said.

"Can you get her out of there?"

Jiro grinned crookedly, and without another word,

one end into a noose. Slipping it over the head of one of the stone ice maidens, he tightened it, tied the other end around his waist, and then turned toward the thuellai. "I guess we'll find out," he muttered. "Throw me."

Jana plucked Jiro out of the snow. With the might of her powerful forge-made limbs she hurled the kobold into the center of the creature. He smashed into Sated Fang, feeling several of his ribs crack. Shards of ice slashed at him as the thing's maddening howl filled his ears. He wrapped his arms around the monk and held her tightly as Jana hauled at the rope, drawing them out of the monster's grasp.

They fell to the ground with a thump. As soon as they hit, Jana's voice rang out. "Rava, fire of the forge, light in the darkness! Let your holy flame pierce the cold!"

A pillar of fire descended from the sky, engulfing the thuellai. The snow around it melted into boiling steam as it screamed in agony.

"Look." Jana pointed, and Jiro and Sated Fang saw the thuellai escape the flames and take to the air, fleeing the valley.

"Ah," said Sated Fang.

"Follow the cold," said Jiro.

"More than that," Jana said, "I know who we are fated to meet next in our quest. That creature did not simply happen upon us: it was sent by its master, to whom it now returns."

Jiro stared. "Who?"

"Boreas," Jana said. "My friends, if we are to find what we seek, we must bargain with the North Wind itself."

There was a long silence. "Can we eat first?" said Sated

A DARK WORLD OF DEEP MAGIC

Over time, our worlds change. That's one of the hardest things to realize about a campaign setting, because when we start a new game, it all seems fairly clear. Heroes over here, villains over there, they fight, players laugh and shudder and make good decisions and terrible choices. Sometime later, the world . . . proves stranger we thought. Unanticipated volcanoes erupt, or cultists infiltrate peaceful villages, or demonic invasions succeed in tearing down an impregnable citadel.

What happens when player actions change what we thought we knew? Temples rise. Evil necromancers die their final death. Someone needs to draw new borders on the campaign map, and turn a few city markers into ruins (or vice versa).

In the first edition of Midgard (called the *Campaign Setting*) in 2012, we promised to stack high conflicts, create a living world, and determine if the spirit and essential themes of the world could include change, decay, and rebirth. Here we are, five years later (and ten years in game time), and all that has come true. The nations of Midgard have fought, some have fallen apart, and new nations are being born. Borders have shifted, and a new mayor has taken office in Zobeck, as is tradition. Despite a great deal of change and heroic adventure, the heart of Midgard is unchanged—or truth to tell, has grown more interesting, richer in its strangeness, stronger in its ley lines and its magic.

Our dreams may change, but they are still our dreams and our worlds, and so they still reflect the drive that stirred us to create this world in the first place. The shadow roads are still open, though now the Shadow Realm is easier to explore. The deep magic is still calling, though its ley lines are now more clearly mapped.

I think change and growth and expansion of a world is one of its greatest joys. Go forth, and discover with your own eyes new lands and borders, which rulers yet live or have been deposed, and what plots have been foiled or grown in the passing of time. Midgard awaits you, deeper and wider and more fantastical than before.

Onward!

Wolfgang and the Kobold Team
Kirkland, WA
August 2017

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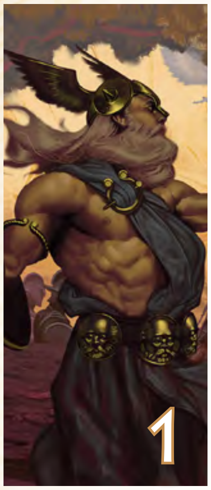

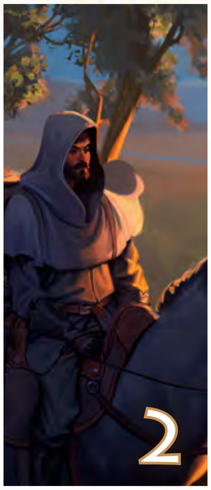

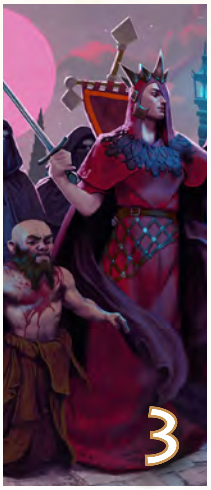

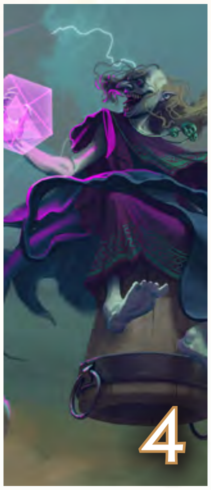

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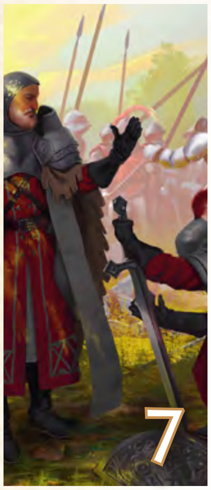

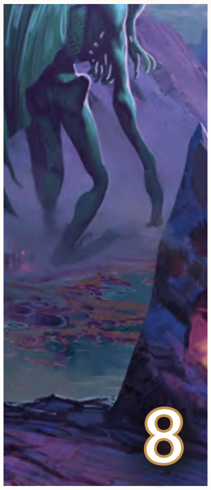

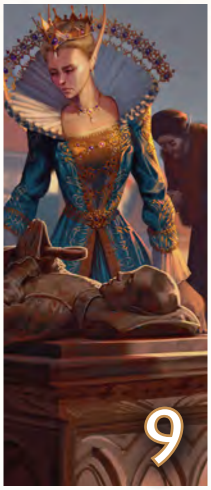

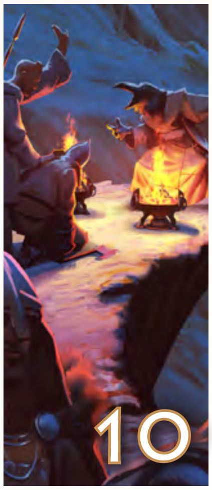

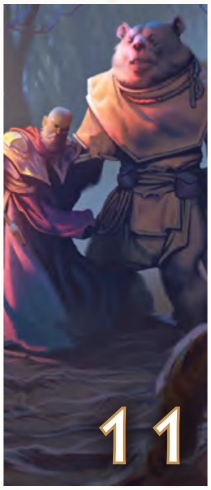

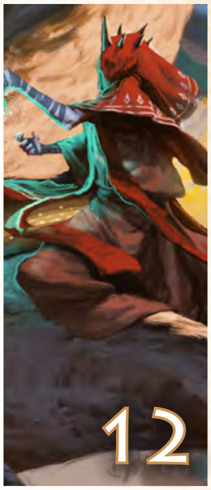

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OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

1

THE WORLD MADE NEW

The age of heroes is dead, and the bridge to glory is broken—Bifrost fell long ago. The world is lost in an age of war, of dark wilderness and lost empires sunk beneath the waves. Only magic and the warmth of hope keep lights aglow when dread things prowl and the priestly wardings shake, bent by hideous otherworldly rage. In this dark time, heroes must arise to claim the crowns of Midgard and restore the jewels to her scattered thrones. New heroes must lead a return to glory!

SEVEN SECRETS OF MIDGARD

At first glance the Midgard campaign setting might seem familiar, flavored with a strong dose of European and Middle Eastern mythos, a medieval level of technology, and races taken directly from the greatest fantasy traditions.

Dig a little deeper, and you'll find some surprising twists that take Midgard from standard fantasy to exceptional vision. These seven foundational mysteries provide a quick summary for the game master (GM) who wants to plan out a short campaign or a long arc.

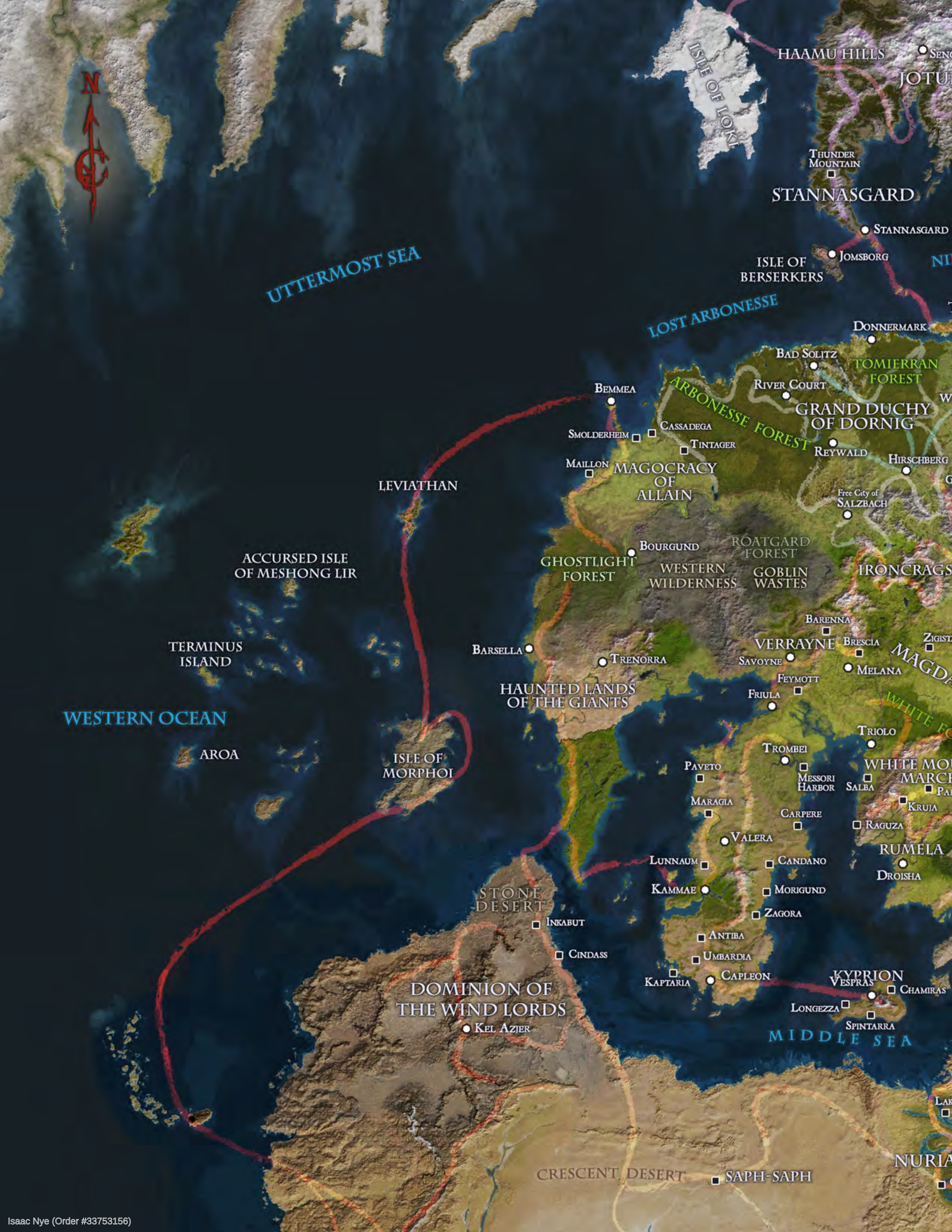
A FLAT WORLD

The flat world of Midgard floats in a vast space of living stars. The heavens are accessible to great heroes who dare to visit them, by climbing a tower into the heavens or sailing to enormous heights on Void dragon wings. A great serpent surrounds the world, or so claim those few travelers who have been to the edge of the world. What lives underneath? No one knows for sure. Midgard is not a modern world dressed up in a few medieval bits of armor and weaponry. Midgard makes the mythic real, with a world to explore from edge to edge.

Wotan, the Valkyries, and the stout hearts of the Northlands stand as an iron wall against the giants and their void dragon.

ELEMENTAL DRAGON LORDS

The dragons of Midgard correlate to the elements rather than to colors and metals (though all the traditional dragons are present). They obey an urge to power and rulership, and they exercise that rule through an entire empire that carries their name. All dragons seek to rule their provinces and to carve out power, the better to amass treasures. As their willing servants, dragonborn, kobolds, and drakes are rewarded with lands and wealth of their own. The dragons of Midgard have no interest in sitting in a lonely cave, counting coins. Their greed makes them ambitious, and that ambition makes them extremely dangerous. They do not wait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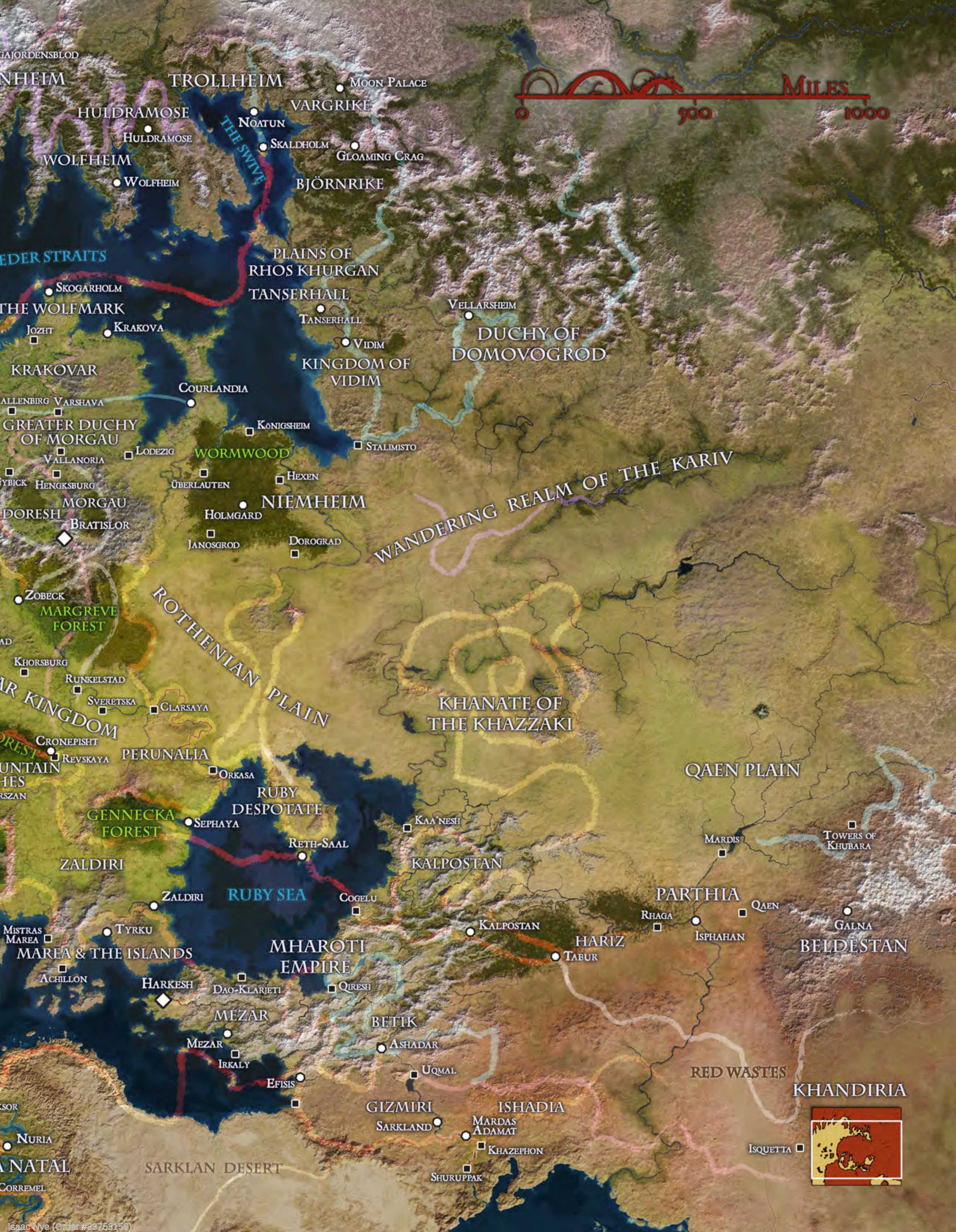
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for their fate to visit them, but instead they climb aloft and survey the land, knowing it is all theirs for the taking if their claws are strong enough to hold it.

Gods That Dabble and Plot

The Midgard pantheon has needs, and the urge to meddle. The gods dispense spells and miracles to their faithful, but they make clear demands of their worshippers and priesthoods. The gods also argue, sire children to rule kingdoms, and foment wars and feuds. Divine murder and enslavement are possible, and this is part of the reason why the gods of Midgard wear masks (see Chapter 12). Their hatreds and rivalries spill out from the heavens and into the mortal streets and kingdoms.

Every deity has distinct goals and desires, and they specify what they expect of their followers.

Hidden Races

The Midgard campaign features the traditional humans, elves, and dwarves as well as new races, including the ravenfolk, minotaurs, kobolds, dragonborn, and trollkin. These races had a place in the world from the start, their ambitions leading to the founding of unique kingdoms.

Concealed races still hide in the corners of the world to surprise players, such as the intelligent, ghoulish darakhul, the feral catfolk of the Southlands, and the mysterious winterfolk. Humans are the most numerous people and their kingdoms are grand, but Midgard offers many flavors of nations and a wide range of heroes and villains.

Ley Lines and Shadow Roads

The land is alive with ley line magic, and some know how to harness that power for spellcasting and magical travel. The elves used the magic of ley lines (see "Ley Lines," page 38) to create and sustain the shadow roads (also called the fey roads), making it possible to connect a far-flung empire. When the elves retreated from the world, their roads remained, and humans and the shadow fey learned to tap into the ley lines that sustain this magic. Player characters and villains alike can use these wellsprings of power, which flow invisibly everywhere—though the most powerful ley line conjunctions are warded or guarded, used as the foundation of great fortresses or thriving cities. In Midgard, you can increase the level of magical power to unheard-of levels, without destroying the reality of the setting outside those ley line conjunctions.

Shifting Borders and Falling Kingdoms

Midgard is a world of cultures designed to change, collapse, and grow over time—and in this new edition of the setting, some of those changes have come to pass. Borders have shifted, crowns have been seized or restored, and cities have been plundered or rescued from ruin. Midgard is a setting intended to change after every adventure; the work of the heroes in Midgard challenges the existing order, gives rise to great new lords and ladies, or sees the failure of hope and the death of kings. The results of some of the last five years of play and development have been integrated into the world, both in Zobeck and farther afield.

There's no point to playing a game where nothing changes but the statistics on a player's sheet. As GM, you can and should take advantage of the inherently unbalanced politics or dangerous triggers built into the setting. Those ancient curses and festering revolts are there for your campaign. Find out whether your players have what it takes to change things—for better or worse!

Time Flies, and Status Matters

Two optional rules make Midgard special. The Status rule (see "Optional Rule: Status," page 24) gives player characters a type of advancement linked not to level but to

Creation

- Dragons live in the early Void and create mountains of iron and gold.
- The gods create Midgard from the corpse of Aurgelmir.

Vanir War

- The gods war among themselves until Wotan brokers a truce, ending the Vanir War.
- During the war, Volund and Thor create the dwarves to oppose the elves.
- Elves plant Yggdrasil and nurture it as the first World Tree; offshoots later prosper in distant lands.

The Reaving

- The northern dwarven kingdom falls. The surviving dwarves declare war on the elves. The elves flee from the North to the West.

~5,000 years ago

- Nuria Natal forms as a country over 5,000 years ago, founded by humans who ascend into gods.

An Abridged Chronology

Different nations remember history slightly differently, but some events are part of the sagas. This is one such telling, the Bard's Chronology as told at Skaldholm, meant to provide a useful history of Midgard's days from long ago to the current struggles against giants, dragons, and horrors from the dark.

difference in who they can visit and how they are treated—not that important in most dungeons but possibly vital in the Court of the Imperatrix of Dornig or when trying to counter a Dragon Empire ambassador's plots.

Similarly, the Time Flies optional rule advances campaigns quickly so that months and years can fly by, and events of a campaign roll out at a less hurried pace. Generations can rise and fall, and adventurers can see their careers as a long arc rather than a brief set of fireworks.

STORIES OF THE GREAT RACES

With those points in mind, let us draw back the curtain on the world and its people. It is a place of great danger and a few flickering lights, holding out against a tide of darkness that threatens to engulf all lands in a new age of horrors and barbarism. Midgard is a place in need of help, where a few stout hearts can turn the tide, or a few bad decisions can plunge a kingdom or an empire into bloody ruin.

Let's start at the beginning with the creation of the world, as told by several of its great races, the dragons, giants, dwarves, elves, and humans.

All races agree the world is flat, has a single sun, one major moon, and six planets. Beyond these facts, the details of Midgard's origins are shrouded in mystery. Almost all the gods and giants and other powers claim to have created the world. Some of them must be lying, and likely all of them are. The most common tale is that of the Northlanders who say that in the beginning, before Midgard was created, there was only the endless Void called Ginnungagap. At one extremity of this vast abyss was biting cold; at the other, raging fire. How did the Void become the world? That is a matter of theology, arcane ponderings, and bardic mysteries.

Out of the Void Came Dragons

The dragons claim that they are all directly descended from the stars and that their wings once brought them (and their favored servants) through the endless darkness to stony realms of iron, gold, and ice. Through their song, the endless toil of blood mages, and the carvings of the earth dragons, in time the followers of Khespotan bound together enough mountains to create a small world, which was ruled by Veles, the Father of the Void, and his servants,

Time Flies Campaigns

The Time Flies rule states that during a campaign, the timeline always advances between game sessions by a period of not less than twice the real-world time that has passed. If it has been a week since you last played, then two weeks passed in the game world; if it has been a month, then two months have passed. Just add the time to the game's calendar, noting that it includes rest and recovery time or downtime or heroes-on-vacation time If the group is in a dungeon or on a highly time-sensitive mission, apply the additional time once they return to a suitable location.

For campaigns that seek to emulate the storytelling rhythm of a long-form saga, consider increasing this modifier to at least two months of game time between sessions. As a result, characters can age at a noticeable rate (six game sessions equal one year of game time), and generational effects become more pronounced. In addition, this prevents the chronological oddity of heroes going from novice to archmage in only a year or two.

~4,000 YEARS AGO

- Ankeshel rises in the Western Ocean.
- 3,909 years ago, the first king and queen are coronated on Ankesh.

~3,000 TO 2,000 YEARS AGO

- Ankeshel falls, and the world declines into barbarism. The sinking of Ankeshel floods the Western lands.
- Dwarves rule in the North while humans and others struggle on the mainland, contending with the rise of other brutal races. Nuria Natal remains powerful and unbroken.
- Survivors of the fall of Ankeshel land at the Stone Desert shores and become the Tamasheq.

2,000 TO 1,799 YEARS AGO

- Aeromancers fleeing Sikkim find the Celestial Waterfall at the source of the River Nuria.
- Three Windlords of the Dominion banish Boreas the North Wind to the Northlands.
- Elves arrive from the Summer Lands and settle on the outskirts of the Arbonesse Forest. Their empire grows all the way to the Ruby Sea.
- The first elven capital springs up at the hidden River Court under Emperor Xindrical the Explorer.
- The second elven capital forms the eastern hub of the empire at Sephaya on the Ruby Sea under Queen Shillesh Greensun Sephaya, the Daughter of Yarila.
- The third elven court briefly thrives at Liadmura, home of the Eagle Emperor of Valeresh.

[redacted]

is the work of Veles and Khespotan, of iron and blood merged with fire, air, and water, and that the world of Midgard was always meant as a realm for dragons to nest, to secure their hoards, and to rule the lesser races. But as any fool—scaly or not—can see, all gold and all jewels and all wealth rightfully belong to the dragons and their kin, for they pulled it from the Void and bound it into the world.

And yet the dragons also claim the world ends every so often, in fire and ruin, and is reborn stronger and scalier. When the time approaches, the dragon prows on longships will come alive and speak praise of Veles. The statues of Khespotan will stir and pronounce the final prophecies, and everywhere true dragons will let ring the call to rise and serve! Exactly how the world is reborn after such destruction is in dispute, but all the many dragonkin are sure the renewal turns to their favor. An end time is always [redacted] world was made by, for, and under the claws of dragons, and all other races are pale imitations of the true folk.

[redacted]

Even some of the lesser races can sense the Void and its ancient power. Those few souls are drawn to the Void, to death and power and an entirely false sense of controlling fate. These are the Void Speakers, who see the strands of Fate and sometimes warp them. Many are of the scaly races who know their role in creating and dissolving the world, though others also welcome the darkness from which all life came. The Void welcomes them all back into its embrace.

The Void Speakers are often warped or driven mad by their proximity to power, and yet they are unified in their dark beliefs. Void Speakers share a common language, said to be the language of the dragons at the

[redacted]

GIANTS' CREATION FROM BLOOD AND BONE

Giants tell a different tale of the earliest eras. Life sprang up in the center of the Void where rime met flame, melting and boiling. This was Aurgelmir, the first and greatest giant, from whose body both the earth and sky were crafted. Creatures sprang from Aurgelmir like branches on an oak, among them the first giants and the eldest of the gods, who fought on dragonback against the giants. The two groups warred, and when Aurgelmir sided with his giant kin, the gods slew him.

The giants have never forgotten this murder. Since that day they've nursed a grudge and hope one day to see the gods' dominion ended and their forefather avenged. Loki always stands ready to remind them of the offense, and Boreas whispers of the glories of battle. Most of the dark gods find the giants' grudges most convenient to this day.

The gods, meanwhile, fashioned the world from Aurgelmir's corpse. His bones became the earth and his blood flowed out to fill the rivers and seas. From his teeth they fashioned mountains and his hollow skull became the sky. With giants cowed by the cleaving of Aurgelmir, the gods explored their new-forged world and soon they fell to strife among themselves.

The gods of nature and the gods of passion and glory formed factions and fought for dominion over their new realm of Midgard, and Creation trembled with the blows they struck. Eventually canny Wotan, always wise and victorious, brokered a truce. The gods exchanged hostages and peace descended once more.

Smaller races took their place in the world, and the gods watched. As far as the giants are concerned, they are still the true inheritors of the world and its treasures.

[redacted]

1,800 TO 1,501 YEARS AGO

- [redacted] elven capital at Thorn under the High Queen Lelliana Thorntree Endiamon.
- Human kingdoms arise outside the elven lands: the Sun Kingdom of Cassilon (in 1749, Cassilon crowns its first king; the Great Kingdom in Illyria (1,600 years ago, the Illyrian bloodlines begin); the Magdar Kingdom; the Electoral Kingdom of Krakova; the Mountain Kingdom of Morgau; the Moon Kingdom of Roshgazi; and wizard societies of Caelmarath and Vael Turog.
- Khensu fails to usurp the Nurian legacy. His Blood Pyramid is laid to waste.

1,500 TO 901 YEARS AGO

- [redacted] builds a glorious amphitheater, starts traditions of poetry, wine, and art.
- 1,300 years ago, minotaurs found Capleon as a colony and harbor, trading with Kyprion and Roshgazi.
- 1,100 years ago, Blood Mother Margase is born, the most powerful of the Red Hags and founder of the Emerald Order of Verrayne. Dark druids prosper.
- 1,000 years ago, elven colonies found Valera and Triolo on the Gulf of Triolo. The elven capital moves to Valera when Thorn falls.
- 1,000 years ago, the Moonlit King binds House Stross to govern the Crossroads.

900 TO 649 YEARS AGO

- [redacted] first castle.
- 900 years ago, skirmishes flare between Nuria and Roshgazi.
- 850 years ago, elven priestess Ilenna Silverthorn founds Kammae Straboli as an abbey and temple of Sarastra.
- 810 years ago, Caelmarath society revolts against the elves. The Black Sorceress's Revolt lasts 20 years.
- 810 years ago, refugees from the Revolt settle Morgau.
- 732 years ago, Rothenian riders settle the Magdar Kingdom. Humans seize Bourgund and Maillon after the Black Sorceress's Revolt.

Rise of the Dwarves

During the conflict between gods called the Vanir War, the smith god Volund and the thunder god Thor created the dwarves. Warriors forged on an adamantine anvil, the dwarves were intended to counter the wild elves of Thorn in battle, who sided against Wotan's forces with the giants, the fey, and the wilderness gods Freyr and Freja, among others.

Fearless warriors and giant slayers, the dwarves achieved great deeds in the name of their patrons. Legions fell beneath their glittering axes and the dwarves became proud, believing themselves the greatest of all mortal races. Perhaps this was their undoing.

No mortal knows for certain what caused the Reaving, as dwarves call the fall of their mighty Northern civilization. Many believe they began to favor Volund over Thor, delighting in craftsmanship rather than warfare, and the Thunderer was filled with wrath and smashed their mountain kingdoms into the sea. Others claim that it was treachery from beneath the earth, an alliance of dead souls slain by dwarven axes and the defeated yet vengeful fey, who infiltrated their halls and brought them low from within. Early reaver dwarves claimed that elves were responsible, and they immediately went to war with their old enemies. Grove by grove, mile by bloody mile, they drove the elves and their allies out the North. Most fled to the West, across the sea.

Centuries later, after the fall of the elven empire (see below), dwarven followers of Volund continued the push farther southward, where they made a new home in the Ironcrag Mountains and the smith god became their preeminent deity. Those in the North stayed faithful to their dual heritage, however. They remain fierce warriors, slayers of elves, giants, and trolls, the proud and vengeful clans forever dreaming of a time when they can reclaim their fallen empire.

The Land of the God-Kings

The tales that the ancient Nurians wrote down and passed to their progeny make it clear that this oldest kingdom of Midgard is over 5,000 years old. It began along the banks of the River Nuria, where seven human families gathered at the end of a long journey. The stories vary on whether they were fleeing an ancient evil, fell victim to collapsed mystic portals, or were following some mystic portent.

But all agree that, as the travelers rested on the riverbank, a wizard among them noticed a unique arcane energy within the water. After drinking, the wizard realized that he could touch the local ley lines, the mystical streams of magic flowing across Midgard. Taking charge of the seven families, the wizard declared that the river would be called Nuria, which meant "luminous" in the families' native tongue. He ordered their new city to be built upon its sandy banks.

Down a long line of succession, the wizard-kings and sorcerer-queens of Nuria experimented with ley lines and the river's magical water. They extended and prolonged their lives until they unlocked a kind of semi-divinity. Further, they developed the rituals needed to awaken from the slumber of death should their descendants need aid. Since then, the Nurians have regularly called upon their sleeping god-kings and god-queens for protection. Along with the major gods of the Nurian pantheon, these ancient rulers have watched over their kingdom since before the time of the titans, from the days of Ankeshel to the present day.

Now, Nuria Natal is one of the greatest—and certainly one of the oldest—kingdoms of the Southlands. It has waxed under wise leadership and waned during times of folly and collapse. But a new dynasty always arises to ensure that the legacy of the early god-kings never vanishes entirely. At present, Nuria Natal is in a period of growth, though it has not yet reclaimed some lands it once ruled, such as Ishadia, Kush, Makuria, and Siwal. The present

650 to 501 Years Ago

- 610 years ago, the rise of House Stross in Zobeck begins. To the east, the future Master discovers the conjunction of ley lines at Demon Mountain.
- 582 years ago, the shadow fey bargain with the Queen of Night and Magic and split the fey roads. Roshgazi founds colonies in Kyprion, Corremel, and Capleon.
- 560 years ago, the dragon Mharot hatches in the Dragoncoil Mountains.
- 523 years ago, human General Orazio de Renzo and dwarven engineer Leonie Silverhair found Trombei as a fortress.

500 to 476 Years Ago

- 492 years ago, human magocracies spring up in the elven lands.
- 482 years ago, the Great Retreat begins as elves withdraw from the mortal world. The elves of Thorn, Valera, Liadmura, and Sephaya depart. Only the River Court of Arbonesse remains, closing its border.
- The human magocracies begin to feud among themselves, summoning Dread Walkers and other horrors during the Great Mage Wars.
- Volund's followers in the North head south to make a home in the Ironcrag Mountains.

475 to 451 Years Ago

- 475 years ago, the Imperatrix becomes Grand Duchess of Dornig to prevent squabbling among the remaining elfmarked of the Arbonesse and its vassals, securing her role as ruler of Dornig among humans as well.
- 460 years ago, minotaurs found the Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar in the wake of the elves' retreat.
- 460 years ago, Carridoc, Emperor of Valera, escapes into an elven mirror. He is released about 400 years later and rules again from behind the scenes.

[redacted]

dragons of the Mharoti Empire and strengthening trade and diplomatic ties with Capleon and Kyprion.

RISE AND FALL OF ANKESHEL

In those ancient days, humans mastered magic and alchemy, engineering, navigation, and many other useful arts. They were citizens of Ankesh, an island in the Western Ocean blessed with rich deposits of copper, iron, and orichalcum. These humans built great cities, slew aboleths with vril rifles and lightning spears, traveled in flying carriages, and built orichalcum temples of shining gold. It was a golden age that lasted long centuries, perhaps a thousand years. Some believe the aboleths destroyed the island nation in the end. Others believe it was different horrors—krakespawn, the shining children of Caelmarath, the titanic servants of the sea god Nethus, or the arrival of the sea-devil sahuagin—that overran the walls of Ankesh and drove its people into the sea. Some blame the monstrous leviathan called the Isonade, which rose to destroy the western lands in a later age.

When Ankesh fell 3,000 years ago, all contact with the island was lost. The world sank into barbarism for centuries; the coasts were places of terror and avoided by the wise. The dwarves ruled in the North, humans and others struggled on the mainland, and goblins, gnolls, ghouls, ogres, centaurs, and other brutal races thrived. Nuria Natal remained as the only human kingdom of any size and power, its dynasties threatened but unbroken.

Elsewhere, chieftains and petty kings held power for a generation, then fell back into chaos and struggle against the darkness. The light and knowledge of the world glimmered and went out.

ARRIVAL OF THE ELVES

Roughly 2,200 years ago, the second great nation of elves

[redacted]

settled farther south, and their magic and archery was supported by powerful bonds of magic, oaths to their fey queens and kings, and a knack for securing the vassalage of other races. These Valeran elves slowly built their empire from the Western Ocean all the way to the Ruby Sea, ruling the humans, gnomes, halflings, and others who saw in the elves a restored hope for civilization. Their cities were tall, their magic powerful, and their mastery of living things, art, magic, and swift travel gave them a powerful advantage. They swept all other nations before them and built cities in the high places and the forests. They planted the seeds of the World Tree far and wide and pushed dark terrors away from the shadow roads, making them bright passages from one haven to another. The more distant regions were all connected to the elven centers of civilization by the fey roads, magical routes that compressed journeys of weeks or months into mere days or hours.

The elves ruled over at least five centers of culture and imperial power over the span of their 1,300-year reign, each corresponding to a different king or queen: first in the planeshifted and hidden River Court of the Arbonesse under the Emperor Xindrical the Explorer, then the eastern hub of Sephaya on the Ruby Sea under Queen Shillesh Greensun Sephaya, the Daughter of Yarila, and her children who built the Summer Gardens of Gennecka. The empire briefly lingered at the High Court of Liadmura in the Ironcrags where the Eagle Emperor ruled, in a time of conquests. The empire then centered for the longest time in the great capital of Thorn under the High Queen Lelliana Thorntree Endiamon, and her daughter the Shadow Princess Sarastra—mother of the shadow fey bloodlines, driven into exile in the Shadow Realm. Finally, when Thorn fell, the capital rested in the southern metropolis of Valera.

[redacted]

450 TO 401 YEARS AGO

[redacted]

- Perunescu, the "Lady of Lightning" and a demigoddess daughter of the storm god Perun, founds Perunalia near Sephaya.
- 424 years ago, the ocean-behemoth Isonade nearly sinks Allain. Caelmarath is destroyed along with Cassilon, Balinor, Vael Turog, and Carnessa. Survivors rename the ruins the Wasted West.
- Dwarves seize Liadmura, creating the first Ironcrag Canton.
- House Stross begins building the Griffon Towers to defend their fortunes in the Margreve Forest.
- A mage of Vael Turog becomes the Master of Demon Mountain.

400 TO 301 YEARS AGO

- Mountains form the Mharoti Sultanate. They seize eastern elven lands from Sephaya to Nuria Natal. The minotaur coastal cities of Roshgazi and Cindass are destroyed, driving the minotaurs to Capleon and Kyprion.
- 370 years ago, the Green Walker's onslaught ends through the elder druids' sacrifice.
- 340 years ago, Exarch Vermes II rises to rule in Bemmea, vital in preserving the Magocracy of Allain.
- 310 years ago, arcane fire consumes the Library in Bemmea. The ruins smolder to this day.

300 TO 251 YEARS AGO

- seizes the throne. Combined forces of Krakova, Doresh, and the Magdar Kingdom nearly drive him from his dominion. Lucan allies with the ghouls.

[redacted]

and the Margreve Forest also held large elven enclaves, but if so the details are lost—only a certain elegance to their towers, green thrumming ley lines, and overgrown groves attest to their time there.

Those few foolish nations that opposed the might of the elves were quickly brought to heel by a combination of elven might at arms (primarily their swift archers and light cavalry) and elven magic (which, it is said, could bewitch entire armies). The histories of this period are few but clear in their deep regard (some might say terror) of the elven war machine and the “sacrifices to Valeresh” that elven armies sometimes made of opposing officers and generals. The elves wiped out entire noble families, officer ranks, and royals who opposed them or rebelled against them.

The Young Kingdoms

Sheltering under elven wings, various human magocracies and kingdoms arose starting around 1,800 years ago. Each pursued its own path outside the elven lands. Most are still remembered, but few survive to the present day.

As the human kingdoms grew to prominence on the outskirts of the elven lands, in mountains and plains where the elves elected not to rule, their strength, pride, and daring grew likewise. The secret societies of Caelmarath and Vael Turog began as human guilds within the Elven Empire, and they considered themselves apart and above elven rule. Although they resented elven authority, they profited from its arcane knowledge and experimented with magic the elves considered dangerous. The societies created their own lords, titles, tithes, and loyalties. The elves attempted to subvert them, but they proved difficult to dissuade through either reason or force.

The Mountain Kingdom of Morgau, Electoral Kingdom of Krakova, the Great Kingdom of Illyria, and the Sun

[redacted]

years ago, the Krakovan nobility built their first castle and throne about 900 years ago, and Morgau was settled 800 years ago, all on the edges of wilderness never explored or developed by the elves. These traditional kingdoms created cities, castles, and great monuments in their regions of the world. The elves considered these realms interesting but not threatening. Morgau and Krakova fought over their borders, but the other human kingdoms kept busy securing their territories. Cassilon befriended the desert giants and storm giants, and together humans and giants built great cyclopean fortresses in the Pytonne Mountains, fearing elven encroachments that never came.

The Moon Kingdom of Roshgazi, led by the minotaurs of the South, thrived and sent forth colonies throughout the middle sea to Kyprion and Corremel and Capleon, settlements still influenced the Moon Kingdom’s faith and people. Roshgazi’s Labyrinth was famous throughout the world, said to rival the works of the elves.

The last of the Young Kingdoms was the Magdar Kingdom, settled 732 years ago by a Rothenian tribe of human riders from the east. The riders saw the elven spires of Sephaya, and their king decided that this was a good place to trade. The Magdar quickly made war on both Illyria and Morgau—and the elves paid little attention. The Magdar built cities throughout the plain east of the Ironcrags, and their kings were more interested in piling up castles than wooing the elves. Though the noble families of the Magdar initially learned magic from the elves, they gave it their own cast.

In time, the Young Kingdoms profited greatly from trade and knowledge brought from the west, and they also brought great wealth to the Elven Empire through their sheer number and fecundity. As they grew stronger, some humans resented the elder race, and this led to “elf hunts”

250 TO 201 YEARS AGO

- [redacted] Harbor City of Prezhan, one of the first major ports taken.
- Prince Lucan of Morgau takes Doresh, but the dwarves seize Grisal.
- 210 years ago, gnomes of Niemheim sell their souls to archdevils to escape their deals with Baba Yaga.
- 210 years ago, the dragons invade the northwestern Southlands, but rebuffed by the combined strength of the Wind Lords, the dragons turn toward Nuria Natal but are stymied there, too.
- 210 years ago, Grisal captures part of Dornig near Hirschberg.

200 TO 125 YEARS AGO

- [redacted] visitor to Hexen in Niemheim returns with news that only gnomes may enter the now-closed town.
- 160 years ago, monsters of the Great Waste wipe out the house of Salzbach. The crown of Dornig awards the city to its remaining defenders and inhabitants.
- 125 years ago, dragons burn the city of Avaris. The fifth god-king, Aten-Akman, is awakened to defend the city. Aten-Akman invokes his death curse, creating the Black Spire.

124 TO 101 YEARS AGO

- [redacted] unites the Khazzaki.
- 109 years ago, Achillon and its territories fall to the dragons.
- 105 years ago, Hakon of the Broad Embrace lands near Donnermark. His ancestors rule there to this day.
- 110 years ago, the Ghoul Imperium rises under Morgau. Tonderil the Bonebreaker rules for 23 years, uniting the ghouls for the last 9. Haresha Winterblood rules for the next 12 years.

BLACK SORCERESS'S REVOLT

Roughly 800 years ago, the tieflings and humans of Caelmarath society revolted against elven rule in the First Great Revolt, often referred to as the Black Sorceress's Revolt after Melathea Stross, the sorceress who led the uprising. The elves brutally suppressed the revolt but the wizards carried on in secret, summoning fiendish allies and corrupting the fey roads. They carved out their lands in opposition to the elves by using dark powers. The revolt burned out within 20 years, between arcane cataclysm and the Dread Walkers and madness, but not before humans seized control of Maillon and Bourgund and built arcane strongholds at Vael Turog and at Bemmea. A strange wise woman named Baba Yaga—long known in the east—offered her services to the rebellion, calling up fortress walls overnight, unbinding elven wards, and releasing demons by the score.

The elves sought to limit the damage, but the human willingness to call on dark powers combined with the tremendous human advantage in numbers was difficult to withstand across an empire spread thinly from the Western Ocean to the Ruby Sea. The elves soon became entangled in a hopeless struggle that threatened to corrupt their hidden lands. The elves feared human contamination of the elven homeland, and for good reason. Demons, devils, and horrors could easily walk the fey roads if elven vigilance slipped, or if an elf gave in to darkness.

The records of the period say the fey roads and the Elflands became magically corrupted. The elves who became the shadow fey threw in their lot with the dark powers that the mages of Caelmarath summoned and sent against each other. The shadow elves taught even more foul magic to certain human and tiefling families, such as House Stross, House Neckart, and House Galbrion, among others. Their hideous servitor-demons were the shining children of Caelmarath as well as the elder Dread Walkers whose strength grew as the portals between worlds were disrupted and expanded. Though the shadow elves were corrupt, most elves remained on the side of light, and they found the growing fusion of magical and mortal realms abhorrent and vile.

THE GREAT RETREAT

At last the elves decided not to join the mages of Caelmarath in their infernal descent into ever-greater madness. The elven roads shut down; the fey method of transport suddenly disappeared, and the legions marched out from Thorn and Valera for the last time, banners flying, to distant lands far from the reach of men. Those who believe the elves marched to war say they fought a great battle in the Realms Beyond to undo the evils of the wizards of Vael Turog, House Galbrion, and the other diabolists. Others believe that the elves merely prevented further summoning, and reestablished the borders of the Elflands on the far side of Midgard.

During the Great Retreat 482 years ago, the elves withdrew from the mortal world and went back to the Elflands. The elves have never explained their decision to leave the world, and those who question them get no answers. They abandoned their empire within a week, and houses and roads alike stood empty. The elven songs stilled, their towers gathered spider webs, and they stripped courts and halls bare of all readily portable goods.

The dwarves and humans stepped in as masters of the empty realms, but the high civilization of Thorn, Valera, Liadmura, and Sephaya was gone. Only the River Court of Arbonesse remained as an elven stronghold, closed to all outside contact. The elfmarked were abandoned by their parents, forced to make their way in a newly hostile world. Servitor races such as the gnomes and halflings were suddenly free of the obligations and protections of their elven overlords. The gnomes fled the elven halls while the halflings found new masters, or at least new friends, in the small human realms.

The races that paid obeisance to elves were suddenly free to run their own affairs, but the first years after the

100 TO 86 YEARS AGO

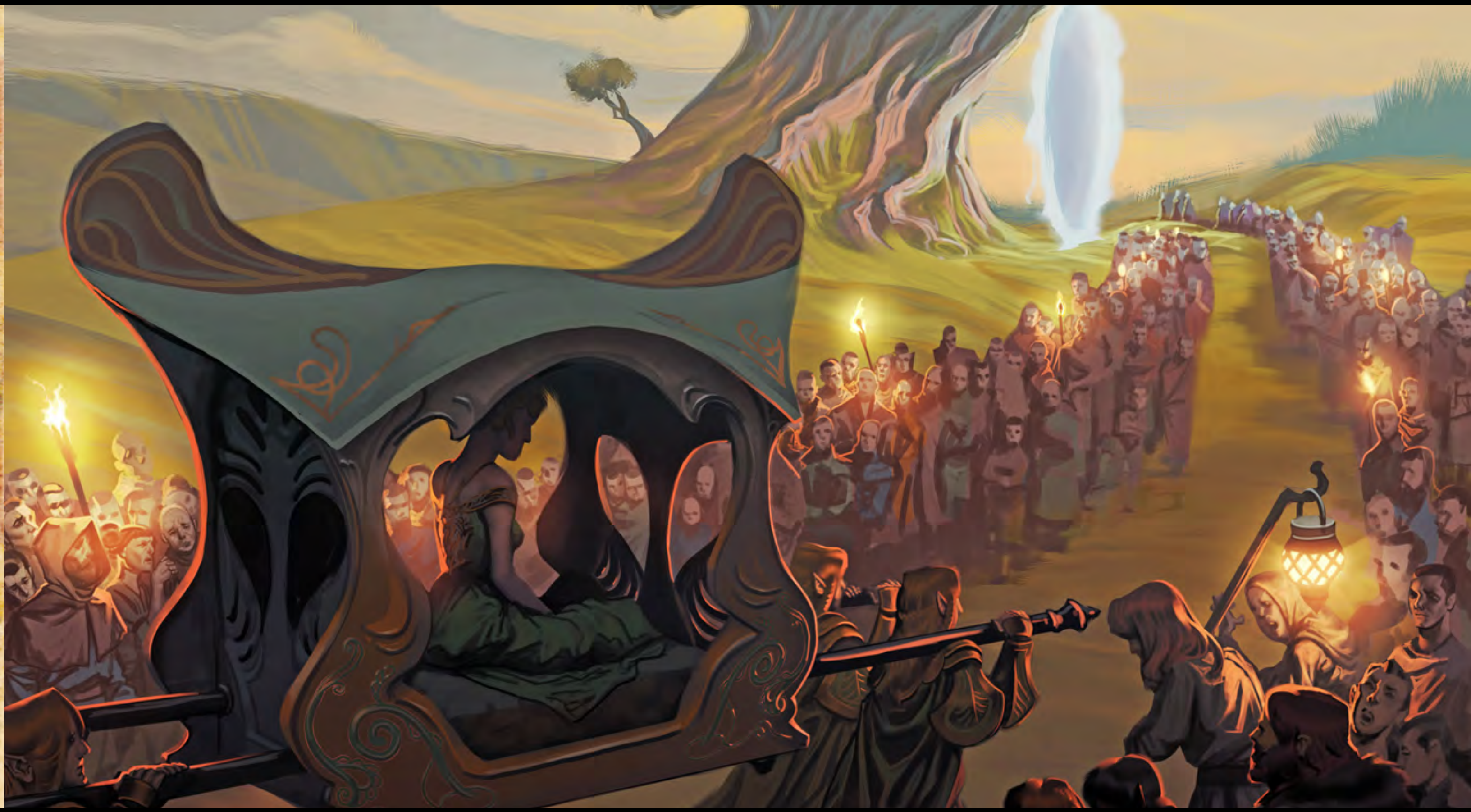
- 92 years ago, the people of Zobeck cast off the feudal masters of House Stross, declaring Zobeck a Free City. Their patron, the Gear Goddess Rava, helps them create the first gearforged north of the Middle Sea. 90 years ago, a Tintager sea patrol finds Ankeshel ruins. The First Lord of the Coast, Faleron de Guimarch, founds Cassadega at the site.
- ~90 years ago, the alliance of shadow fey and humans dissolves. Castle Shadowcrag falls into disuse.
- ~90 year ago, Perunalia forms an alliance with Zobeck.

85 TO 61 YEARS AGO

- 85 years ago, House Mervanta forms as a vassal of Dornig, consisting of a single tavern in Salzbach.
- 70 years ago, Domovogrod and Vidim ally to defeat Ulf the Azure King on the Plains of Rhos Khurgan.
- Exarch Vermes II destroys those responsible for the Hakren Affair.
- 70 years ago, Khazzaki heroes unite to slay Achaz and destroy the Horned Crown. Achaz dies but the Crown is hidden by Siemev the Old.
- 66 years ago, Loki steals *Menneskelig-dod* (the Azure King's weapon) from the tsar's palace and hides it.

60 TO 51 YEARS AGO

- 60 years ago, the Khazzaki of Rhos Khurgan, the gnomes of Niemheim, and the Duke of Domovogrod ally to quell a centaur bandit king. Afterward, Niemheim's army turns its crossbows on their Khazzaki allies in a great offering to their infernal masters.
- 52 years ago, Ra-Amon-Ra, the prophet of the Sun God Aten, is martyred in the Nurian city of Per-Xor by dragonfire. His followers continued to expand their faith, throwing down the idols of other gods and declaring the supremacy of Aten



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mines around Liadmura, creating the first of the Ironcrag Cantons. A new human kingdom emerged during this

[redacted]

The victory of Caelmarath was complete, having won human independence and total freedom from elven

[redacted]

50 TO 41 YEARS AGO

- 50 years ago, Mharoti forces drive the minotaurs off the mainland at Marea and Tirovec. The Minotaur Queen allies with Triolo.
- 46 years ago, the balor Wra'onai ravages Nuria Natal but falls to the god-king Sut-Akhaman.
- Vermesail the Gravedancer succeeds Haresha, ruling the Ghoul Imperium for 58 years.
- The Zobeck Council sells the abandoned Griffon Towers to merchants. The Coaching Inns are established.

40 TO 31 YEARS AGO

- 40 years ago, Yafram revives and returns to her prior plan to conquer Siwal.
- 40 years ago, Kjord defies Prince Lucan of Morgau in Gorez.
- 39 years ago, Baba Yaga warns Lucan about Kjord. Lucan slays Kjord; the *Spark of Kjord* persists to this day.
- 37 years ago, the Spider Prophet receives a vision of a Mharoti threat in the form of dragons disguised as Tamasheq.

30 TO 21 YEARS AGO

- 30 years ago, High Priestess Rowanmantle conducts the Great Stone Purge in the Stone Galleries of Dornig's eastern border.
- 30 years ago, Zobecker merchants Jabber and Tuck begin trade with the shadow fey.
- 30 years ago, King Stefanos of Magdar Kingdom marries Queen Dorytta the Fair of the Barony of Runkelsheim.
- 30 years ago, Krakovans elect King Eynryk to rule their country.
- 25 years ago, Titus Patrascu and Hecate's minions capture Nethus, binding him bodily in Kammae.
- 22 years ago, drow assassins slay Vermesail. Nicoforus the Pale rises to rule the Ghoul Imperium.

interference. But Caelmarath could not control the powers it had unleashed, and its last gasp followed soon after. The warring mages could not agree on who led them or whose summonings were greatest, and they started to clash among themselves once the common enemy was gone. This conflict led to the period called the Great Mage Wars (see Chapter 8). The rampage of the Dread Walkers, the Isonade's sinking of the western Arbonesse, and the eldritch devastation of the war forever changed the landscape of the West.

Rise of the Imperial Dragons

Over 300 years ago, the dragons of the Dragoncoil Mountains decided that raiding villages was a pleasant pastime, but the subsequent incidence of human, minotaur, and gnollish incursions into their territory was growing alarming. It was time, they decided, to found a kingdom of their own. After years of discussion and negotiation among their children, the kobolds, and the dragonkin, the dragons swore a compact that they would allow a human to rule and administer the land, as long as a tithe and tribute was paid to the dragons every 10 years. In return, the dragons swore to fight together to destroy any army arrayed against them, or to send the "children of draconic blood" in their place—meaning, legions of kobolds and dragonkin.

This was the founding of the Mharoti (Mah-ROW-tee) Sultanate, in which humans, kobolds, and dragonkin successfully seized all the lands of the eastern elves from Sephaya to Nuria Natal. They plundered far afield, demanding tribute from the Ruby Despot and the Daughters of Perun as well as the Southern realms of gold and salt. They took much of the land that was once the Kingdom of Illyria and the far eastern realms of Khandiria and Beldestan. They seized land near the Dragoncoil Mountains, and even reached beyond Nuria Natal to destroy two coastal cities of the minotaurs, Roshgazi and Cindass, ending the so-called Moon Kingdom period. The minotaurs of Cindass resettled in Capleon and Kyprion, but in Roshgazi the devastation was so great that the people sought more distant sanctuary. These Roshgazi minotaurs boarded a great fleet of ships and sailed west, and they were never seen again. The Lost Fleet of Roshgazi remains one of the mysteries of the early Mharoti Empire. The Nurian counterattack against the Mharoti coastal invaders drove the dragonfolk back in one of relatively few major defeats.

The dragons learned from those mistakes, yet still they lust for gold. To that end, each year the sultan or sultana leads the armies into the field in search of gold and silver to make up the next tribute to the dragons of the realm. These dragon-generals have grown to more than 20 in number, and each considers itself a master of earth and sky. The Mharoti Sultanate grows as they do, and its people are certain their destiny is to rule the earth as the elves once did. Their greed is great, and their ability to make war and conquer lands seems unstoppable.

A Prince of Morgau

About 310 years ago, the vampire Prince Lucan arrived in Morgau and ingratiated himself with the king of Morgau, then seized the throne. He infected the children of his bloodline with undeath and adopted the faith of the Red Goddess. After his ascendance, he was nearly driven from the throne by the combined armies of Krakova, Doresh, and the Magdar Kingdom. However, his undead strength and persistence gave Prince Lucan an edge, the ability to return again and again and convert his enemies to his side. Furthermore, he made a second alliance, this one with intelligent and organized ghouls. The next attempt to drive him from his throne was a complete rout, with Morgau's army killing (and devouring) the cream of Krakovan and Magdar nobility on the Field of Salesh.

Within 50 years, Lucan conquered Doresh, but the dwarves of the Ironcrags took Grisal before he could capture that as well. The vampire lords' undead power

20 to 16 Years Ago

- 18 years ago, Triolo chooses a minotaur as Duke and Admiral of the Republic.
- 12 years ago, the old Mharoti sultan Makbule Khezmir the Wise dies and his granddaughter Sultana Casmara Azrabahir ascends to the throne.
- Blood Mother Margase secretly controls Verrayne.
- 17 years ago, the huginn seer-poet Songraven sneaks in to see the chained god at Kammae Straboli.

15 to 11 Years Ago

- 15 years ago, the Leviathan is spotted in the Western Ocean.
- 14 years ago, rumors spread that another Azure King, Fjolmod son of Ulf, has appeared and seeks his father's lost weapon.
- 13 years ago, Shibai and Ishadia clash over slavery and the Showka Passage. Dozens of ships burn and sink.
- 11 years ago, Titus Patrascu resides in Tintager as Otho Greyhair until he is rumored to be slain by agents of Hecate.

10 to 6 Years Ago

- 10 years ago, the darakhul and the vampires of Morgau march into Krakova and conquer the kingdom entirely, declaring the birth of the Greater Duchy of Morgau.
- 9 years ago, dwarven reavers establish the Wolfmark and seize the city of Johzt from Morgau.
- 8 years ago, the sea god Nethus is restored to his divinity as the husband of Hecate and patron of Kammae Straboli.
- 7 years ago, the Dragon Empire conquers the Grand Duchy of Illyria and renames it the province of Rumela. Its nobles flee to the Drake's Perch and Triolo and Raguza.
- 6 years ago, Nurian theurges ally with the fleets of Capleon, Kammae, and Triolo to win a great naval victory over the Mharoti galleys. A Mharoti admiral is captured.

[redacted]

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often than with their neighbors. As they have grown more numerous, it becomes harder for them to feed their ghoulish allies. The newly taken Krakova remains a precarious conquest but a very rich one. They are surrounded by enemies: Baba Yaga, the amazons of

King Lucan and his undead hordes remain dangerous but somewhat contained within the hills and forests of Morgau and Doresh and the new rolling plains and hills of the province of Krakovar.

[redacted]

5 TO 1 YEARS AGO

- 4 years ago, the shadow fey return to Zobeck.
- 4 years ago, Dornig's queen falls into a magical slumber. Her alleged granddaughter, Kalvora Moonsong, has been acknowledged by the Imperatrix's Regalia, though she has few friends in Dornig.
- 3 years ago, the thursir and other giants march into the human and dwarven lands of the North. The trollkin, surprisingly, arrive to defend against Loki's servants.
- 2 years ago, the Great Prophet Tivishta Trikinta of the dust goblins gathers the Children of the Great Goat into a mighty army and unleashes a new Dread Walker.
- 1 year ago, the priesthood of Mavros declares a great struggle against the Mharoti and issues a call to cease the endless war among the Septime Cities.

CURRENT DAY

- Nicoforus the Pale is the undisputed ruler of the Dread and Endless Imperium of the Darakhul, the Empire of Ghouls, for more than 22 years.
- Sultan Ozmir Al-Stragul celebrates his fifth year on the Dragon Throne.
- The Imperatrix of Dornig is technically still a monarch, but her court seems to be losing heart.
- King Thutmoses XXIII remains a strong ruler in Nuria Natal, and his daughter Perititi has been sent to strengthen ties with the Minotaur Queen of Kyprion.

Return of the Elves

In recent years, the shadow fey, the elves of the Arbonesse, and the elves of various other courts (see the "Dead Courts and Abandoned Holdings" sidebar on page 27) have grown restive. Fey interference in human and dwarven affairs is more prominent than it has been for centuries. While some of this includes the usual mischief of the shadow fey in the Crossroads, near Tintager, and along various sections of the White Mountain Marches, other elements are more difficult to quantify or explain. An elven knight wearing the full regalia of the Chosen of Valeresh joined a pilgrimage to the Seat of Mavros, whispering fervent prayers to the elven face of the god of war—and striking down the one pilgrim who attempted to interrupt him. Various wizards of Bemmea and Friula claim that elven arcanists have come to their libraries, seeking volumes of dusty lore. At least a few companies of adventurous, prickly explorers have sought out ley line nodes, items, and lore, and are working toward some goal, perhaps related to shadow fey dabbling, perhaps related to the Imperatrix's malady, perhaps related to the apocalyptic blather of Loki and the priests of dragon gods.

The elves are entirely unwilling to discuss the matter, but they are restoring a few shrines of their gods, planting seeds for new towns, and calling up old servants. So far, it all amounts to a few scouts and curious savants and sages poking around. The more suspicious humans and the crustier dwarves claim that all this portends some new elven invasion or an attempt to balance the moves of the shadow fey with counter-moves by the summer elves of Solindera. For now, it gives some people hope of a new age of peace, and worries others that elven ambitions in Midgard are not quite extinguished.

RECENT EVENTS

Certain events of the past century are still resonating with the people of Midgard, their kingdoms, and their destinies:

- 50 years ago, the minotaurs were pushed off the last of the Illyrian mainland at Gourniamos, and their queen swore an oath of vassalage to Triolo in exchange for naval assistance against the Mharoti Empire.
- 12 years ago, the old Mharoti sultan Makbule Khezmir the Wise died and his half-breed granddaughter, Sultana Casmara Azrabahir, ascended to the throne.
- 10 years ago, the darakhul and the vampires of Morgau marched into Krakova and conquered the kingdom entirely, declaring the birth of the Greater Duchy of Morgau.
- 9 years ago, dwarven reavers established the Wolfmark and seized the city of Johzt from the Blood Kingdom.
- 8 years ago, the sea god Nethus was restored to his divinity, though much changed. He now believes himself to be a good and true husband to Hecate and an equal partner in the rule of Kammae Straboli.
- 7 years ago, the Grand Duchy of Illyria fell to the assault of the Dragon Empire, and its nobles fled to the Drake's Perch and to Triolo and Raguza. The dragons now rule over the new province of Rumela.
- 6 years ago, Nurian theurges allied with the fleets of Capleon, Kammae, and Triolo to win a great naval victory over the Mharoti galleys near Marea, seizing over 100 ships and sinking more than 50. The Mharoti lost more than 30,000 sailors and slaves, and the Mharoti admiral Tolga Serkhan al-Harkeshi was captured by Johennes of Salzbach, an elfmarked mercenary in the service of Capleon.
- 5 years ago, the Sultana Azrabahir escaped with her life, her vizier, and her closest companions when the Dread Sultan Ozmir Al-Stragul stormed the palace, pledging to honor Azuran and bring great victories in Veles's name. She found refuge in the Seven Cities.
- 4 years ago, the shadow fey returned to Dornig, and when rebuffed there, they sent an ambassador—His Excellency Glaninin Thelamandrine—to their former fiefdom at Zobeck. While the shadow fey's plots to assert their claim and rule Zobeck were defeated, they are a much greater presence in Zobeck now than they have been in several generations, since the days of debauched House Stross.
- 4 years ago, Dornig's queen faded into a magical sleep, and her court is increasingly one of silence and despair. Kalvora Moonsong has presented herself as the chosen heir, though she has few friends in Dornig.
- 3 years ago, the thursir and other giants of Thursrike and the western mountains began to march into the human and dwarven lands of the north. The trollkin, surprisingly, came down from the hills to defend against Loki's servants.
- 2 years ago, the Great Prophet Tivishta Trikinta of the dust goblins began to gather the children of the Great Goat into a mighty army and unleashed a new Dread Walker on the borders of Dornig.
- 1 year ago, the priesthood of Mavros declared a great struggle against the Mharoti, and a dispensation to cease the endless war among the Septime Cities in favor of a reconquest of Illyria. Triolo, Trombei, and Kammae compete to lead the unified states. The Emperor of Valera was annoyed his nation was not automatically given deference and plans a parallel effort.

REGIONS OF MIDGARD

The *Midgard Worldbook* details many culturally and geographically distinct regions. The river and roads of the Crossroads region stand at the center, surrounded by the Dark Kingdoms to the northeast, the Rothenian Plain to the east, the border of the Dragon Empire to the southeast, the imperial hodgepodge of the Grand Duchy of Dornig to the northwest, the Seven Cities peninsula and islands to

[redacted]

The frosty Northlands and Hyperborea lie across the Nieder Straits, and the sunbaked Southlands stretch far beyond the Middle Sea. With the notable exception of the Dragon Empire, each of these regions share many gods, language, and culture.

The North includes the dwarfholds of Tanserhall, Stannasgard, Wolfheim, and Thunder Mountain as well as human and inhuman lands such as Trollheim, Björnrike, Skaldholm, and Huldramose. Most of these lands are small in size and population. Some, like Thursrike, are trollkin and giant lands where humans and dwarves are enslaved or entirely absent.

The West includes the regions of the Western Wastes (also called the Goblin Wastes) and the Western Wilderness, the Haunted Lands of the Giants, the Magocracy of Allain, and the lands beyond the Western Ocean. It also includes numerous ruins, the crucial western port city of Barsella, and the sunken lands of Lost Arbonesse. Beyond lie scattered islands and cold ice.

Two additional distant regions are not covered in this book. The first are the Kingdoms of Gold and Salt, a

Lignas, Morreg, Terrotu, Narumbeki, Sebbek Sobor, and Kush, as well as the Corsair Coast.

The second is the Utter East, including distant Khandiria beyond the Dragon Empire, a land known only through trade for most citizens of Midgard, as well as Sikkim, Leng, Sailendra and the pirates of the Lotus Islands, the Qillian Plain, and Far Cathay (or the Heavenly Kingdom of Kitay). Each area is extensive enough to merit its own catalog of wonders.

PEOPLE OF MIDGARD

The realms of Midgard have always been home to a half-dozen major races and a handful of minor ones. All races certainly aspire to heroism and strive to do great deeds, but some are fewer in numbers. These varied people provide the bright blades that hold back the darkness.

MAJOR RACES

The dragonborn, dwarves, elves, gearforged, humans, kobolds, minotaurs, ravenfolk, and shadow fey all have some claim to status as the great and powerful races of Midgard. Though some are few in number, the major races all have a long history, powerful patron gods, and widespread influence in their homelands. Most have or had nations of their own.

Humans

The humans of Midgard are both numerous and thriving, with kingdoms and duchies and small settlements scattered from shore to steppes and from icy vastness to searing sands. Human racial traits conform to 5th Edition standard traits for humans. For additional traits and abilities, see the *Midgard Heroes Handbook* (*MHH*).

Variations in culture and languages categorize humans into seven main groups and many smaller ones.

Caelmarans: The descendants of the nine magocracies—Allain, Andarre, Barsella, Caelmarath, Carnessa, Cassilon, Molovosch, Uxloon, and Vael Turog—are a pasty lot with hair varying from rust-red to moss-green as common as black or brown. Some claim that the Caelmarans are all tainted by association with demons and devils, pointing to the high prevalence of tieflings among the shattered towns and deserts of the West. Caelmarans speak Common, though many also speak the Northern Tongue.

Dornigfolk: The numerous Dornigfolk of the Great Duchy have skin ranging from pink-white to a watery brown, and hair from brown to blond, though red hair is largely unknown. The Dornigfolk pride themselves on their work ethic and their elven empress, and they consider themselves the last bastion of the true Empire of Thorn. Those pretenders in Valera arouse only their pity and scorn. Dornigfolk speak Elvish and Common.

Kushites: The people of the great southern bastion of Nuria Natal are the best known of the Kushites, but this group also includes the desert folk, the Siwalese, the Mharoti humans, and many others. While all share mahogany skin and dark hair, their rulers and customs are quite different. Kushites take great pride in their status as the first and greatest of the human kingdoms. Most speak Nurian and many also speak Southern dialect or Draconic.

Magdar: Dark-haired and customarily green-eyed, the Magdar are beautiful and relatively tall among humans. They have rich, musical voices and an efficient way with horses and oxen. Though many Magdar ride the Rothenian Plain or wander far afield as mercenaries or adventurers, their kingdom is a strong one, and the Magdar are bold explorers and fighters. A few Magdar have a regrettable tendency to drunkenness. They speak Common, and a few speak Draconic or the Northern Tongue.

Northlanders: Pale and tall and strong, the Northlanders are a race of survivors and warriors. Their hair runs to pale blond or even white, sometimes with golden or red streaks. Their eyes are often a piercing blue or purple. They speak the Northern Tongue, and many also speak Dwarvish or Trollkin.

Roshgazi: Dark-skinned and eagle-nosed, the Roshgazi are associated with their friends the minotaurs. They roam the western deserts of the Southlands as well as dwell in small villages in Capleon, Kyprion, and Cindass. They speak Roshgazi, a language closely related to Minotaur. Speakers of either language can understand the other.

Septimes: Olive-skinned and dark-haired, the people of the Seven Cities, Rumela, and Kyprion call themselves the Manzaro, but most others call them the Septimes. They are a small and swift people, quick-speaking and sometimes too quick with a blade. They speak Common and a dialect they call Valeran.

Other Peoples: Dozens of smaller groups of humans consider themselves distinct from their neighbors, including the Kariv, Khazzaki, Mharoti, Khandirians, Nurians, Olandska, Toar, and Vadi. Most speak Common and have a private language of their own.

Human Corruption

When the other races speak ill of the humans of Midgard, their complaints are clear: humans are corrupt, decadent, and untrustworthy. Humans are more prone to breed with demons and devils, become the prey of vampires, and turn into the tools and toys of elves. The entire existence of the elfmarked is attributed to human fecundity and general lack of discretion. Dwarves, gnomes, minotaurs, and other races are far more concerned with the purity of their bloodlines and the maintenance of their traditions and heritage. Human traditions are strong in some places—witness their schools of magic or their knightly orders—and quite weak in others. In the eyes of other races, humans require persistent watching and paternal oversight, which explains why dwarves and elves can seem so constantly condescending.

The general sense that humans are more readily bribed, coerced, seduced, and corrupted encourages demons, devils, shadow fey, and other horrors to prey on humans in preference to other races. Perhaps this makes the impression a self-fulfilling prophecy, and other races are just as susceptible to corruption but simply less tempting targets. If human strength lies in the ability to adapt and in its large populations, human weakness originates in the race's lusts, greed, and lack of discernment.

OPTIONAL RULE: STATUS

In Midgard, prestige or status is a matter of public importance, and the setting assumes that PCs come from different stations, social classes, and backgrounds. This social standing is reflected in the optional Status attribute. This attribute is generated at character creation like ability scores, but it can fluctuate considerably during play.

The Status attribute is rolled on 1d6+1 if other statistics are rolled, and it starts at a flat score of 4 if a point-buy system is used. Characters add their Charisma modifier to their starting status. Status increases further by special actions (see Tables 7–1 and 10–1).

GM Note: Status determines which player character most NPCs will defer to. Note which PC has the highest Status at the start of any given game session, and have all NPCs address that character as the default party leader. The character with the highest Status is always the best-known and most-respected PC of the party in the eyes of others.

Some PC races or classes begin with a Status bonus or penalty at the start of play. See Table 1–2: Starting Status Adjustments. Classes and races not listed have no adjustment to starting status.

Table 1–1: Status gives typical Status values for various NPCs, as a yardstick to gauge player character Status.

DRAGONBORN

The dragonborn are the youngest race of Midgard, growing quickly in the extent of their rule. They are common only in the Mharoti Empire, and indeed they are a consequence of its founding; the dragonborn were unknown before the unification of the dragons. They have spread beyond the Dragon Empire and now flourish throughout the south and east of Midgard. ("Dragonborn" describes this race; the term "dragonkin" refers collectively to all the scaled races. See Chapter 5.)

Dragonborn are considered a race of great presence and ability but driven by greed and arrogance. Such a young race should be more humble, or at least less demanding. And yet the dragonborn justify their arrogance with so many battles fought and won. Their penchant for warfare and their success at seizing plunder make many wonder whether they are especially favored by the World-Serpent Veles. The dragonborn are quick to claim his blessing, and the blessings of their draconic gods.

Dragonborn are powerful scaled humanoids, clawed and fearsome in size and strength. As might be expected, the resilience and arrogance of humans fused with the scaly magic and toughness of dragons is a powerful combination. Most dragonborn have gray, brown, tan,

TABLE 1–1: STATUS

Status	Social Standing
0	Slave
1	Thrall, bond servant
2	Serf, kobold, goblin, bandit
3	Peasant or farmer, laborer, huginn
4	Commoner, adventurer, sailor, guard, centaur
5	Guild apprentice, journeyman, militia member, dwarf
6	Master smith, cooper, artisan, miller, scout, elfmarked
7	Merchant, soldier, watchman, archer, gearforged
8	Guild leader, bishop, bandit chief, ranger, corsair
9	Master merchant, councilor, paladin, cleric, elf
10	Ship or army captain, mayor, clan chieftain, caravan master
11–12	Knight or petty noble, cult leader, court jester, senator
13–14	Noble heir, castle commander, master of spies, herald, dwarf chieftain
15–16	Lord or lady, dragonkin edjet, merchant prince, noble, general, admiral
17–18	Baron, earl, jarl, margrave, magnate, master duelist, notable wizard, ambassador
19–20	Provincial governor, khan, keeper of treasury, dwarven hall lord
21–25	Prince, princess, count, commander of knightly order
26–30	Duke, duchess, royal heir, dragon morza, supreme warrior
31–40	Hero of great renown, high priest of the faith, angel
41–50	King, queen, tsar, tyrant, court wizard
51–60	Emperor, imperatrix, high druid, archmage, divinely favored
60+	Legendary, mythic hero, demigod

TABLE 1–2: STARTING STATUS ADJUSTMENTS

Race	Status
Aasimar	+1
Dhampir	–1
Dragonborn	+1
Dust Goblin	–4
Dwarf	+1
Elf	+2
Elfmarked	+1
Gearforged	–1
Gnoll	–1
Gnome	–2
Goblin	–2
Human	0
Kobold	–1
Minotaur	+1
Ravenfolk	0
Shadow Fey	+1
Tiefling	–2
Trollkin	–1
Winterfolk	0

gold, silver, or black scales; rarely, some display red-orange, green-yellow, or starlike blue-and-black scales.

The dragonborn divide themselves into the Four Elemental Kinds of supposedly purebred lineages, though there is a great deal of mixing among them and hybrids are not uncommon. The flame or fire dragonborn (who bear yellow, golden, or orange scales, with red crests) are the most common, followed by wind or storm dragonborn (blue, white, silver, or gray scales, with black crests). The stone or cave dragonborn are relatively uncommon (brown, gray, black, or rarely white scales, with purple or white crests). Rarest of all are the wave or tide dragonborn breeds, gold, blue, or green scales, with bright green or yellow crests. More common than the purebreds and outside the traditional elemental divisions are the edjet or soldier dragonborn who sport brassy or tan scales with black or rust-colored crests.

Dragonborn males and females are distinct. Both sport clawed hands and feet, their faces are dominated by short snouts, and their eyes are deep and golden or black. Beyond that, male dragonborn are larger, horned or crested, and considerably heavier. Their tails are short and often spiked. Female dragonborn are faster, smaller, and wiry, with longer lashing tails. They sometimes have a frill or collar of contrasting color.

Dragonborn wear armor normally, since their own scales are only slightly more protective than human or dwarven skin. All dragonborn are heavy and slow for their size, but they exude a commanding presence, a sense of destiny that scalykind and non-scaly races alike find compelling.

Dragonborn speak Draconic, which serves as the language of the Dragon Empire, as well as Common.

GREATER UNITY BY LIMITING VARIETY

Midgard contains many races, and there's a certain temptation to see them all as player character races. However, a campaign can gain focus and party unity benefits if the game leans toward one or two spotlight races. As GM, you have some measure of say in how that happens. For instance, if your vision of the campaign is Northlands-centric, you might invite players to stick to humans, dwarves, and either trollkin or ravenfolk (but not both). More than three races tends to turn an adventuring party into quite a motley bunch. At the same time, you're more likely to generate player cooperation and buy-in if you discuss the region's tone, its inhabitants, and what is interesting about the preferred races before character generation begins. Once players have independently made characters of six different races, it's a bit too late to call for emphasis on regional types and tropes.

DRAGON MAGIC

Dragon magic tends toward the raw and uncomplicated: elemental magic and the magic of scale and claw. Occasionally, it also is transformative, as in certain rituals said to turn a kobold into a dragonborn, or a dragonborn into a drake. Dragon magic is discussed in more detail in *Deep Magic* and *MHH*.

DWARVES

The dwarves of Midgard live in three great realms: the Northern clan halls such as Tanserhall and Wolfheim, the free cantons of the Ironcrags, and the southern realms of Nuria Natal and Sebbek Sobor. The dwarves of the three realms are distinct in their culture, strengths, and style.

The Northlands dwarves are keepers of the old ways and the old gods, smiths and warriors, farmers and traders, stout and strong and able to down a barrel of ale at one sitting. They keep busy fighting the giants or the werewolves and worgs in the North, but sometimes the Northern dwarves take to the sea in their longships and raid the coasts, from Vidim through the Donnermark and Krakovar to northern Dornig territories, but bypassing the Magocracy of Allain. The Northern dwarves are especially accomplished at ring-making, smithwork, and (for some reason) berserk shapeshifting, including a society of especially fearsome bear-shirted berserks.

The cantonal dwarves are makers, miners, and smiths, digging deep into the Ironcrags for iron and gold and forging items of great wonder: primarily exceptional spears, crossbows, and arrows, but also great artistic works. Singular items are a lifetime's masterwork: a clockwork steed or wagon, an airship, a returning hammer, or a suit of invulnerable armor. None of these are beyond the grasp of a cantonal smith.

The cantonal dwarves serve no kings, choosing instead to rule themselves. They frequently serve as mercenaries in the Seven Cities, among the nobles of the Grand Duchy, and against the Mharoti Empire, side by side with the Magdar knights. They have a deep hatred of the undead of the Blood Kingdom.

The Southlands dwarves are distant relatives at best, with different language, magic, and style. In the desert heat the Southern dwarves shave their heads and wrap their beards tightly in gold or copper wire; sometimes these beards are forked or braided as well. They serve a male mask of Rava named Ptah, and they build clockwork bodies they call shabti, or servants. Their skin is dark as ebony, and—when not shorn—their hair runs to pure black, gold, or (strangely) red. The Southern dwarves are alchemists and mystics, with a particular hatred of dragons and the Mharoti Empire. They have served the god-kings of Nuria Natal well and faithfully as bodyguards and heavy infantry for centuries, and as engineers who build their temples, city walls, and step pyramids.

Dwarves and Men

The tale of men and dwarves is punctuated by feuds and battles, but they are allies more often than not. At first the dwarves mistook humans for a degenerate subrace of elf and later grouped them among the many "lesser races" of Midgard. Gifts, familiarity, and common ground eventually forged an alliance between the two races, a concord that grew stronger as the old gods gave way to the new, but it was hardly an equal partnership. The dwarves raided into human lands at the least provocation, and their kingdoms claimed huge tracks of land occupied by other races, which the dwarves either drove out or enslaved. Those who proved too troublesome were exterminated.

In the Northlands, dwarven rule required those who submitted to supply tribute in the form of gold and slaves. The human tributes worked hard labor in mines or on lowland farms. These client races first gave their masters the nickname "reaver dwarf." As time passed and more dwarves were lost each generation to southern emigration, war, and vendetta, humanity gained a more even footing. Dwarven culture was adopted by (or forced upon) humanity and the other races of the North and later the Ironcrags, but humans taught the dwarves the arts of restrained diplomacy, cooperation, and peaceful trade. Some say that the dwarves have mellowed over the years, but others claim that humans have simply learned to weather the dwarves' pride and temper. Certainly the dwarves haven't belied the "reaver dwarf" name.

Gunpowder and Airships

The cantonal dwarves of Midgard are the only race with access to gunpowder and airships. This is purely an optional element of the setting, and gunpowder can be ignored entirely. If you choose to include gunpowder, PCs in Midgard will require some connection to the cantons to gain access to proper guns, powder, and related materials.

Airships occupy a similar position. The dwarves built a few of them in the canton of Templeforge, but the crafts are delicate and expensive. Most are used for high-value cargos and urgent military matters, and only a few cantons have an airship of their own.

Ring and Rune Magic

These two schools of magic embed spells into rings of power and create carved runes that make magic visible and available to even nonspellcasters. The dwarves are particularly adept at these kinds of magic since they are said to have invented ring magic and to have learned rune magic at Wotan's knee. See *Deep Magic* or *MHH* for details of these spells and their related feats and subclasses.

Elves and the Elfmarked

The elves are a people apart, as they are quick to remind others. They were not the first settlers of the forests and fields, but they taught humans and dwarves and others the arts arcane and the art of civilization. The empire they founded at Thorn and in the Arbonesse, which later spread as far east as Sephaya and south to Valera, was a wonder for the ages. Its magical roads, its slim towers, and its speedy and lethal armies maintained an age of peace that lasted until a few centuries ago.

Now the elves are a splintered race. Some few with elven blood—the so-called "elfmarked" humans—remain and can claim descent from the great elves of old. The greatest of these is the Imperatrix of Dornig, an aging queen without a clear heir. But the elfmarked are as much human as elf (see *MHH*). The true elves are rarely seen, and defined by three groups: the elusive windrunner elves of the Rothenian steppes, the shadow fey of the Realm of Shadow, and the reclusive river elves of the Arbonesse, who might be the strongest and wisest of the three groups.

The shadow elves keep a court and a king and queen, but their remaining glory is slight, a reflection full of illusion and trickery and deceit. They no longer draw their power from Midgard but from Shadow. The river elves are of the last holdouts of the elves of Thorn, with the River King retaining only slight contact with Dornig. The Arbonesse Forest is their homeland and the river their highway, and their borders include all the land where the leaves' shadow

Dead Courts and Abandoned Holdings

Midgard's elves hold family and city dear, but its nobles traditionally organize around courts as well: the Royal Court of Dornig, the Summer Court of Silendora, the Moonlit Courts of the shadow fey, the Willow Court of the Winewood, the River Court of the Arbonesse, and others are remnants of this tradition. Others may be elven jokes, such as the Squirrel Court of Yggdrasil.

Just as many such courts were abandoned and left to ruin after the Great Retreat. A few of these retain a handful of gnomes, elfmarked, or even a solitary elven caretaker; others are entirely left to ghosts, phantoms, banshees, or wild animals. A few of the more famous abandoned courts include the Court of Owls and the Court of Roses (both in the Arbonesse Forest), the Cloud Dragon Court in the Tomierran Forest, the Griffon Court in the Margreve, and the Summer Gardens in the Gennecka Forest.

falls. The river elves sometimes exile one of their number to wander the world for a few decades, but otherwise, the other races rarely see the elves who built so many castles, roads, and cities throughout Midgard.

On Elven Names

A true elf of the Arbonesse lineage has three names. The first is a birth name given by parents, the second is a common name adopted by the elf upon maturity, and the last is a lineage name, akin to a family name among the humans but taken from a list of a few hundred great heroes of the Elflands known as the Wild Hunt, who harrowed the demons back to their hells. The most common lineage names include Aynwyn, Sheoloss, Kalthania, Derina, Dammung, Rexthathus, and Larentil. Elves with the same lineage name might not be related at all, which leads to confusion among humans. Elves reveal their birth names to their own kind and trusted friends, and their common name to all others.

The Imperatrix was born Regia Kalthania and took the name Moonthorn when she first adventured among the primitives. When she married she added her husband's name Reln according to human custom, and upon her ascension to a noble state she took the vann Dornig title.

Not all elves in Midgard maintain this tradition. The windrunner elves (whom the exiles of Arbonesse say were lower classes of Sephaya who ignored the Last Horn) adopt the naming conventions of the plains, and forget their lineages.

By Dornig law, only individuals with a clear elven heritage can take an elven lineage name. There is a brisk trade among up-and-coming gentry for genealogists who can provide such a link.

Least of the Major Races?

Unlike the other major races, gearforged do not have a homeland of their own, instead existing primarily as an influential minority in Zobeck, the Seven Cities, and Nuria Natal. They are not welcome or actively dismissed in many places. The elfmarked of Dornig consider them crass mechanisms and think of them as "vaguely dwarven," while the nomads of the plains believe them much too delicate for constant travel, and the dragon morza judge them a waste of good metal and potentially sources of discontent since they do not fit neatly into the empire's hierarchy. The Northlands regard them as interesting but hardly paragons of raider courage and likewise lump them under the category of creation of the dwarves, not a people with a unique and history.

Elven Ritual Magic

The elves have powerful forms of ritual magic and traditions that hand those rituals down to their descendants, and sometimes to the elfmarked. More details are available in *MHH*.

Gearforged

The gearforged are the children of Rava, the Gear Goddess of Fate and Industry. Her priests were the first to forge bodies of brass and copper with cunningly wrought gears and well-balanced mechanisms to support thought and action. Each such body is the safe harbor of a soul that once lived in flesh; a special ritual transfers a living creature's soul into the housing that makes it gearforged and attunes it to the soul gems and memory gears that preserve a soul in a mechanical body. Once created, a gearforged can in theory live forever, though in practice most wind down or are destroyed by the ravages of time and the difficulty of surviving as a well-crafted machine.

All gearforged were once other creatures that now inhabit standardized bodies with cylinders, springs, and articulated joints of varying quality. Each is made of iron, brass, and steel and is as distinctive in appearance as other people differ by their hair and eyes. The gearforged are thinking creatures and can serve as city guards and soldiers. Gearforged have free will that separates them from other mechanical devices, which are no more than simple servants responsive to orders and capable of little more than a limited amount of memorization.

Gearforged mechanisms are more than mechanical because all gearforged are machines with a soul. Their arms and legs depend on actuators powered by everwound springs. Their minds depend on memory gears, transverse cognition gearing, and the marvel of a soul gem connected directly to a maze of silver and mithral steam, spark, and magical conduits. These elements are all held in a shell of iron, brass, and steel, and the bulk of the entire construct is remarkable. A large and heavily armored gearforged can weigh 400 pounds since its armor is built in.

Clockwork Magic

Gearforged are the product of a specific ritual of soulforging (see *MHH* for details), using components such as memory gears and everwound springs. In addition, their creation is the apex of a school of magic called clockwork magic, which offers mastery of machines, time, and constructs. It is especially common in the Free City of Zobeck and in some of the Seven Cities, but rare elsewhere.

Kobolds

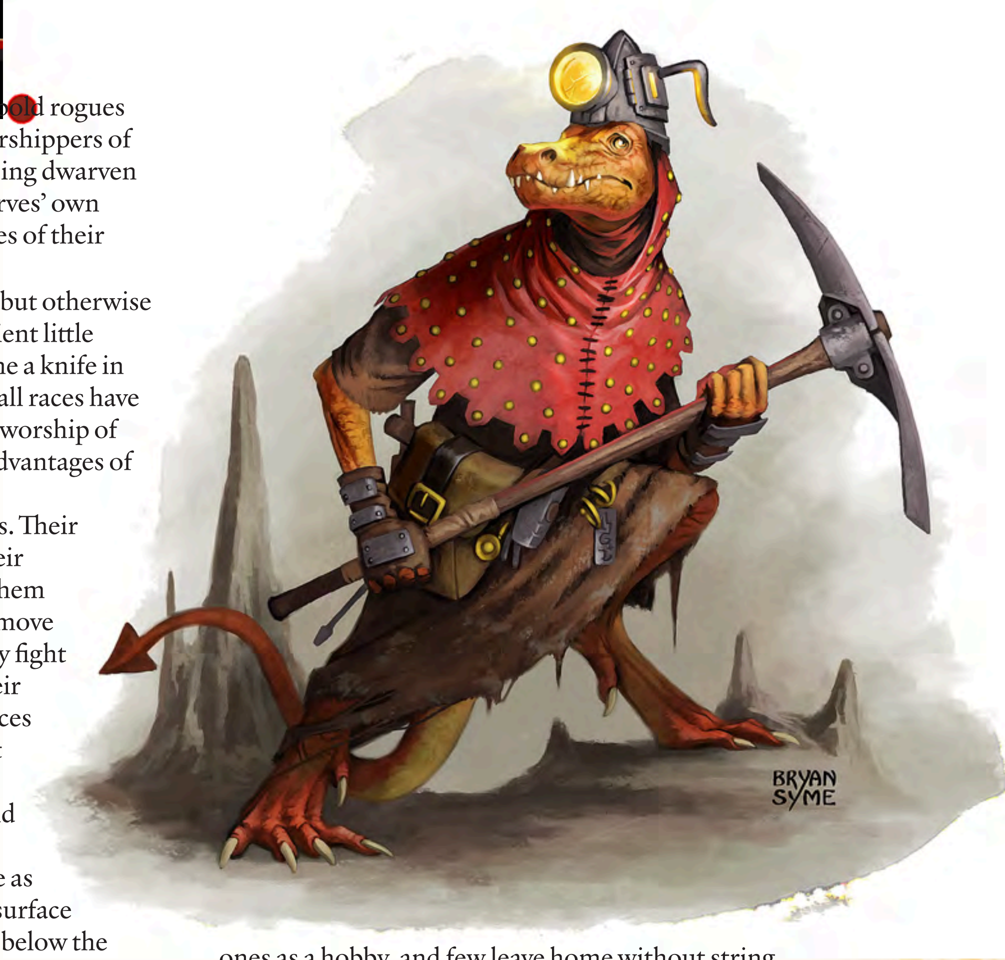
Of the diminutive races, the kobolds have adapted best to the changing world. Enslaved long ago by reaver dwarves, kobolds quickly carved a niche for themselves as miners, scouts, and tinkerers—small enough to be useful and small enough to be dismissed as a threat. At first they were tolerated, then largely ignored. As a result, the [redacted]d rogues and entrepreneurs (many of them secret worshippers of Loki), seemingly subservient but busily trading dwarven goods for resources extracted from the dwarves' own mines and storehouses, right under the noses of their alleged "masters."

Free kobolds defend their mines viciously but otherwise maintain the ruse of a harmless and subservient little folk—at least until the opportunity to sheathe a knife in someone's kidneys presents itself. Other small races have adopted the kobolds' strategy, including the worship of Loki, embracing his cunning ways and the advantages of guile and cunning over brawn and bravado.

More than anything, kobolds are survivors. Their scaly skin and keen night vision as well as their dexterous claws and sensitive snouts make them quick to sense danger, and their clawed feet move them out of peril with a cowardly speed. They fight on their own terms, small and fierce, and their weight of numbers helps them survive in places where larger but less numerous races cannot sustain a settlement. They are great miners, good gearsmiths, and modest alchemists, and they exhibit a curiosity about the world that frequently gets them into trouble. They serve as merchants to both the Underworld and the surface world, with their greatest cities hidden deep below the earth. Their enemies are the diabolical gnomes and the dwarves, competing mining races that seek to overthrow the kobold dominance of dark, rich territories.

The kobold queen of queens—in all her radiant dragon-blooded perfection—rules from Harkesh, the capital of the Dragon Empire. Kobold society is exceedingly social and built around the clan, matriarchal lines of descent, everchanging male kings, and the crucial importance of clutch-mates (those who hatched about the same time, since kobolds are reptilian and hatch from eggs). Relatively few kobolds become adventurers, but those who do generally have either offended a kobold king (and been exiled from the mines as punishment) or have lost their clutch-mates. Adventuring kobolds wish to leave their homes to grieve and find new friends. In many cases, a kobold will "adopt" an adventuring party as new clutch-mates.

Kobolds are deeply enamored of their tools and spend a great deal of effort to improve them. Mining picks, a mason's hammer or jeweler's loupe, and even simple items like a spear or dagger are all named and cherished. At the same time, kobolds tend to gnaw on tool handles, forget to oil blades, or even pry out inlays or decorative gems to improve them. As a result, most kobold items are entirely distinctive and unlikely to be mistaken for anyone else's possessions. Some believe this decorative urge may be a form of defense against theft.



One category of tool deserves special note: traps. Kobolds create wildly impractical traps and simple, deadly ones as a hobby, and few leave home without string, springs, or other triggers for their traps. Kobolds are the only race that recognizes "trapsmith" as a profession.

The kobolds are closely allied with and related to the dragonkin, drakes, and dragons. The kobold kings (and there are many kobold kings since no kobold ruler is ever satisfied with being merely a chieftain) admire the dragons as the sources of wisdom, power, and proper behavior.

MINOTAURS

The bull-folk exhibit many of the same characteristics as the bulls they resemble. Both genders have horned heads covered with shaggy hair. Warriors braid their hair with teeth or other tokens of fallen enemies. The thick hair covering their large bodies varies widely in color, from bright white to medium red-browns to dark brown and black. Many minotaurs shave or dye their fur in patterns signifying their allegiances and beliefs. Other methods of decoration include brands, ritual scars, and gilding or carving their horns.

Adult males can reach a height of 6-1/2 to 7 feet, with females averaging 3 inches shorter. Both genders have a great deal of muscle mass even for their considerable size, and physical prowess plays a large part in their social structure. Minotaurs can live as long as humans but reach adulthood three years earlier. Childhood ends around the age of 10 and adulthood is celebrated at 15. However, most minotaurs don't form their own families until at least the age of 25. They spend those 10 years proving themselves to their elders.

As omnivores, minotaurs consume enormous quantities of both meat and vegetation. Great banquets mark important social and religious occasions, and a successful feast is often a point of regional pride; competition between regional cuisines is fierce, sometimes violent, and eagerly anticipated. Minotaurs are particularly mindful of meals before great ceremonies or displays of skill, and the hosts of such events can earn nearly as much honor as the champions by providing memorable feasts. To fail as a host brings deep shame.

MINOTAUR HORNS

The most valued accessories of any minotaur are his or her horns. Grown by both genders, horns display an individual's status and strength, and they provide a ready weapon in battle. Those who lose part or all of a horn suffer considerable stigma and must constantly demonstrate their worth; the term "brokehorn" is a fighting insult. Some temples will magically regrow a damaged horn for a minotaur who completes a quest or series of trials, though a few famous warriors have gone through life "broken" as a mark of pride and resilience. Those minotaurs who choose to keep a reminder of their failing are the most driven among them.

Many minotaurs chronicle their victories with carvings or etchings on their horns. Warriors display representations of defeated foes, and artisans mark theirs with accolades their work has won. For instance, the killer of a cyclops might have a square rune with an eye in the middle, and the maker of the killer's weapon might have an axe rune with a crown above it. Others earn markings from the great mazes they have solved.

All minotaurs who honor their heritage take great care of their horns, polishing and shining them. Some even gild their horns with precious metals to draw attention to their achievements.

LABYRINTH MAGIC

Minotaurs are masters of the school of labyrinth magic, which includes mazes and confusing charms and glamours, plus trap-spells and wardings. They keep this magic to themselves, never sharing it with non-minotaurs.

RAVENFOLK

Also called huginn or heru, these western cousins of the tengu are scoundrels and not entirely welcome everywhere. Their homeland is in Beldestan to the east or on a branch of Wotan's Tree in the North or on a high cliff of Horus's hidden temple in the South. They have settlements in Trollheim, Vidim, Domovogrod, Nuria Natal, Zobeck, and the Dragon Empire, but none of these are large.

Travelers spot their black feathers and long beaks on the road from place to place, trading information or helping to hatch plots. They are widely viewed as spies, informers, thieves, and troublemakers in Midgard, but when the ravenfolk swear an oath they abide by it. They avoid the West and the Seven Cities and are most honored in Nuria Natal where they serve temples of Horus as sworn guardians, assassins, and defenders.

While their numbers are relatively small, the ravenfolk are counted a great race because of their role as messengers for the gods. They hear the words of Wotan most clearly but also claim to speak for Aten, Lada, Khors, Thor, Loki, Ninkash, and Sif. Occasionally, they bring dark tidings from Chernobog, blood-smeared missives from the Hunter, or demands from Mammon or Vardesain, but these are rare, and the poor ravenfolk chosen to deliver divine messages and prophecies from dark gods are shunned even among their own people.

RAVEN MAGIC

Though the ravenfolk claim to have invented or at least shared the runes of the All-Father, and though their understanding of prophecy and shadow are both excellent, their magic wins little renown in the wider world, for they guard it jealously. They are keen scouts and powerful oracles, and they demonstrate an uncanny ability to bend runes to new uses.

SHADOW FEY

As best as anyone can determine, the shadow fey were once elves and goblins who swore undying and eternal fealty to Sarastra, the goddess of night and magic, and were embraced by her heralds and ambassadors of the Shadow Realm. This arrangement granted them great power over shadow and a twilight kingdom in the Shadow Realm, though at a cost of abandoning their homes and loved ones and turning to the night sky and the stars as their guiding lights. The shadow fey despise sunlight and bear great affection for things of darkness and shadow.

Shadow fey are courtly, swift, and powerful spellcasters, with special talents as enchanters, illusionists, and weavers of shadowstuff. They are prone to corruption and melancholy, though they hold feasts and revels in the old style, as the Midgard elves did when their kingdoms were still whole. The shadow fey have a great love of hunting, trickery, and duels, and they retain powerful hounds, horses, and hunting owls to assist them in finding and destroying the enemies of their eternal king and queen, and expanding the power of the Shadow Realm.

ILLUMINATION AND SHADOW MAGIC

The shadow fey are adept with these two schools of magic that turn starshine, shadow, and light into spells of power. See *Deep Magic* or *MHH* for details of these spells and their related feats and subclasses.

MINOR RACES

A number of minor races live in the civilized lands of Midgard, and many more in its wilderness and wastelands. These include the aasimar, bearfolk, centaurs, darakhul, gnolls, gnomes, dust goblins, tieflings, trollkin, and winterfolk. Most claim a small kingdom or tribal holdings, but none are large enough in numbers or in their command of land and power to shift the tides of history. Some, such as the winterfolk, are barely known. Others, like the gnomes and bearfolk, are simply rare, or at least rarely seen. Even those with some weight of numbers, such as the centaurs and dust goblins, are too scattered and divided to bend history to their will.

AASIMAR

The great Phoenix Throne of Ishadia remains a shining beacon in poetry and song, but the reality for the aasimar is that the Mharoti Empire is devouring them slowly but surely, and they struggle to eke out a victory every time the dragons throw an army their way. Pilgrims and paladins bring coin and a wealth of prayers to the aasimar lands, but the doors to the heavens seem firmly shut, so the power of the angelic folk dwindles. Still, give them a sword and a righteous cause, and they are still capable of putting terror into the hearts of the cruel, the greedy, and the faithless. See Chapter 5 for their surviving kingdom of Ishadia and its remaining glories.

BEARFOLK

Found in the chill lands of the Shadow Realm, on the Rothenian Plain, and the northerly climes of Björnrike and the lands of the giants, the bearfolk are strong and adaptable, displaying great strength as shapeshifters, druids, and shamans, and when commanding spirits to obey and keeping shadow contained. Their fangs, fur, and claws make smaller, weaker races nervous, though most bearfolk prove honest and loyal friends. Their societies consist of scattered tribes and roving bands rather than kingdoms and jarldoms, but all bearfolk acknowledge the Bear King of the Fey, at least in principle. See Chapter 10 for their life in the Northlands, and chapter 11 for their strongholds in the Shadow Realm.

MIDGARD'S MONSTERS

Many monsters referenced in this volume can be found in *Tome of Beasts*, *Tome of Beasts* 2, and *Creature Codex*.

Centaurs

Centaurs are a scattered race and roam in clan groups from the Rothenian Plain (where their numbers are great) to the personal guard of the young emperor in Valera. Everywhere they are considered large and dangerous, and they have a reputation for banditry and bullying. Their archery is excellent and their healing arts well advanced, but they are a nomadic people without much interest in magic or writing, and other races disregard them as a result. They do so at their peril: large centaur hordes occasionally smash entirely cities and small nations flat. See Chapter 4 for their life on the Rothenian Plain.

Darakhul

Like gearforged, the darakhul were once members of other races. However, they live on not as mechanical embodiments but as undead akin to ghouls, retaining the power of speech and having carved out an underground empire, which has now emerged as an ally of Morgau and a power in the Dark Kingdoms. They are powerful warriors, sleepless and cruel, capable of marching days without rest and fighting at full strength.

At the same time, they are hated and feared everywhere, and all good people turn against them, for they feed on the flesh of the living. Within their evil society, each darakhul strives only for itself and obeys its superiors out of fear and hatred. Their dark gods give them strength, but their own bitter, undying hearts keep them far too petty and small to achieve more than war and conquest. See Chapter 3 for more about the strange realm of the darakhul.

Dust Goblins

Alone among the shorter races, goblins refuse to be conquered or adopt even the pretense of diplomacy, so they are treated as vermin and exterminated wherever dwarves and men encounter them. Driven into the wilderness by larger races, goblins are opportunistic scavengers. Many goblin tribes fall under the sway of worgs and nightgarms, which they worship as totem beasts. The relationship between goblins and worgs reverses expectations: the goblins are pets and servants of the lupine lords, not the other way around.

Some believe goblins are the warped remnants of the gnomes who did not escape to the Wormwood, or the twisted results of experimentation on halflings or humans during the Great Mage Wars. They are found in large numbers in the Goblin Wastes, though they are hardy travelers and can pop up thousands of miles away from their homeland, from the Northlands to the Dragon Empire. They have a knack for finding ancient artifacts and lost magic and spend much of their time digging through the dust for such items, then selling them to the mages of Allain. See Chapter 8 for their tribes in the Wasted West.

Gnolls

Most common in Nuria Natal and points south, gnolls are also found in the Mharoti Empire, Khandiria, and even on the Rothenian Plain. They range the desert and plains as hunters and scavengers, and they are expert rangers, scouts, and trackers. Their culture is violent and largely unfriendly to outsiders, but they have a small kingdom in the distant South and act as guardians and avengers throughout Nuria Natal.

Gnomes

Found throughout Midgard in small numbers, gnomes have a single primary home, the dark forest of Niemheim and its surrounding territory. They have a terrible reputation as swindlers, kidnappers, diabolists, and charmers. As individuals, the small folk in their amusing hats and pointy boots seem silly. However, as a race they have struck diabolical bargains for power with Baba Yaga or archdevils, and this has led them to turn inward. Their only close allies are the shadow fey, though goblins and kobolds and gnolls are not particular in their choice of friends, either. See Chapter 4 for their homeland in the Wormwood of Niemheim.

Tieflings

Once widespread in the human magocracies, tieflings grew to dominate Caelmarath's and Vael Turog's noble classes for a time. Those large and public families of tieflings are a thing of the past; they are an exiled people, found in families and pairs but rarely in any larger numbers. In most places they are reviled as the demonmarked or the hellborn, and driven out.

Significant numbers of the demonmarked reside only in Bemmea and Tintager, and even there they seem eager to prove themselves as worthy of trust. Many still blame them for the destruction of human lands of the West and the retreat of the elves. Shadow elves, gnolls, and gnomes enjoy their company, as do some dragonkin. Elves, humans, and halflings rarely abide them.

Trollkin

Combining the strength of giants with the arcane might of the darker fey, trollkin are strong in body and mind, warriors and raiders with a long history of taking what they want from the humans and dwarves of the Northlands and the wilder portions of the Dark Kingdoms. They brandish power over spirits and a deep understanding of the roads between worlds, and their warriors are known for ferocity, courage, and persistence. See Chapter 10 for more about their kingdoms in the Northlands.

Winterfolk

Rarely seen and a stay-at-home race, winterfolk (also called halflings) are encountered as bargefolk on the great rivers and as the most discreet of servants to the River Court or in the Grand Duchy of Dornig. The race was widely believed to have been indentured to the elves before the Great Retreat, and they show great deference to elves and the elfmarked. Most halflings left Midgard for the Elflands or the River Court during the Great Retreat. Those that remained are slightly more adventurous than those who were loyal to the elven masters.

TIME AND THE SEASONAL CALENDAR

The measure of time in Midgard is straightforward. There are 12 months of 30 days each, for a total of 360 days in the calendar, and another six intercalendar festival days: New Year's Dawn, Mustering, Rites of Spring, Summer Festival, Harvest Dances, and the Lantern Festival. With six festival days, the year is 366 days long.

The seven days of the week are the same in most cultures of Midgard: Moonday, Volsday, Wolfsday, Torsday, Marksday, Ceresday, and Khorsday. These common names appear from the Northlands to the Middle Sea and the Crossroads to the Wastes.

The elves and the dragonkin both use different names for the days of the week. The Mharoti of the Dragon Empire call the days Pazar, Nazartesi, Sali, Charsamba, Pehrsembe, Juma, and Umartesi. Among the elves, they are Larasday, Elothsday, Orielsday, Bowsday, Freyasday, Yarisday, and Leafsday or Bacchosday.

The months are measured from the arrival of the new year with the onset of spring in Springmelt or Mustering. The festivals associated with various months are noted below in parentheses. The names in brackets are those used for winter months in the southern regions, where snow is rare or unknown.

Spring

Springmelt (New Year's Dawn, Mustering)
Sowing
Thunders (Rites of Spring)

Summer

Goldflower (Crown Festival)
Low Summer
High Summer (Summer Festival)

Autumn

Harvest Tide (Slaughter Festival)
Redleaf (Harvest Dances)
Last Leaf (Ghost Festival)

Winter

Rimetrail [First Fogs]
Snowfall [Winterwind] (Lantern Festival)
Deep Winter [Winter-rain]

Count of Years

The people and nations of Midgard measure time in many ways, though the most common standard is simply the formula "so-and-so many years ago," counting backward from the present. But records that are meant to stand over time require a count or calendar, and Midgard has at least seven of them. Each such system begins a specific number of years ago.

In many regions, even these counts are unknown since the nations of Midgard are fragmented and largely too weak to impose a unified calendar. Many use a local dating system, such as the founding of the kingdom or counting from the coronation of the current duke, queen, or prince, which of course has very little meaning for other, even nearby, regions.

After the Retreat (AR): The Great Retreat of the Elves to the Arbonesse and the Summer Lands, ending their empires in Midgard. This date, 482 years ago, began a second descent into chaos and war, and led to the birth of the Goblin Wastes and the further decline of the West.

Ankesh Count (AC): No longer in use anywhere, but ancient records from before the elven arrivals date from 3,909 years ago, the date of the first coronation of a king and queen on the island of Ankesh.

Count of the Prophet's Years (CP): The prophet of the Southern monotheistic deity Aten was martyred 52 years ago, and since that time his cult has grown substantially, especially among women, southern dwarves, and the poor. For religious reasons, these people disregard the Dragon Ages and use the Count of the Prophet's Years instead. This does not endear them to the Mharoti officials and governors who encounter Nurian pilgrims, preachers, and merchants doing business with an unofficial calendar.

Daughter's Count (DC): The god Perun granted dominion over Sephaya and the eastern provinces of the elves to his human daughter, Vasilka Soulay. The founding of this kingdom was 432 years ago.

Elvish Thorn Years (TY): Counted from the founding of the city of Thorn 2,190 years ago, and used in Dornig to this day. Formerly used by the Valerans and sometimes referred to as the Valeran reckoning.

Founder's Roll (FR): Counted from the founding of Caelmarath, 492 years ago. This date is still used in the magocracy of Bemmea, the Kingdom of Bourgund, and sometimes in Verrayne.

Horse Years (HY): The kingdom of the Magdar was founded by Rothenian nomads who settled the finest grasslands of the Crossroads region and held them against all comers. They count their dates from the First Horse King, and call this the Horse Years. Nomads and centaurs of the plains know this count as well. The date begins 732 years ago.

Mharoti Dragon Ages (MDA): The dragons swore their compact 347 years ago, founding the Mharoti Sultanate. The empire is the only place that uses this reckoning, but its formidable size and strength means that neighboring kingdoms are familiar with the system.

Old Calendar (OC): The most common reckoning among humans and dwarves dates to the founding of the Sun Kingdom of Cassilon, 1749 years ago. This date is commonly given in brackets after other year reckonings, since it is the best known and most widely traveled.

Shadow Reckoning (SR): The shadow fey date their creation from the time before human revolt, roughly 582 years ago when they summoned and bargained with the Queen of Night and Magic and split the fey roads into those controlled by the summer elves and those held in shadow. Over time, the shadow roads have grown more numerous. Some believe infernal hands were at work here.

Zobeck Free Years (FY): The people of Zobeck revolted against their rule by House Stross 92 years ago, hanging all members of the family and winning a battle against considerable odds. The dating is not used outside the city, but it is typical of the reckoning of years in free cities and smaller kingdoms, which often ignore larger events in favor of their own milestones.

TRAVEL, TRADE FAIRS, AND FESTIVALS

Life encompasses more than harvests, war, and taxes; the people of Midgard travel great distances to trade with far-off lands, and they hold festivals and trade fairs to entice others to visit them. The sections below detail travel, trade, and festivals common in Midgard.

MULE TRAINS, BARGES, AND WAGON TRAINS

Mule trains, barges, wagon trains, and even a few dwarven airships move cargo from spring to late fall, but none of the roads are easy: the threats of bandits, goblins, snows and avalanches, deadly fey, and worse undead all require vigilance and preparation. Most merchants move their cargoes only under heavy guard.

TABLE 1–3: DAILY PAY FOR GUARDS

Type	Pay (gp/day)
Archer	2
Cleric	10
Crossbow	1
Scout	3
Outrider, mounted	6
Wagon master	20
Wizard	12

Hiring: Wagon masters are notoriously picky about who they hire, fearing cowardice, desertion, lack of martial skill, and—worst of all—betrayal of cargos and timetables to bandits or rival merchant groups. In most cases, a new hire begins as a scout, archer, or a lowly crossbow cranker.

Novice, Veteran, and Heroic Pay: In all cases, a novice of any type is untrained and receives half the usual pay. A veteran of the type listed is 2nd to 4th level and receives standard pay. A heroic guard is 5th level and receives 10 times the usual pay. The job pays out on safe arrival at the caravan or mule train's destination.

TABLE 1–4: PACK ANIMALS & TRANSPORT

Item	Availability	Cost (gp)
Barge, small	20%	2,000
Barge, large	10%	5,000
Cart, open 2-wheeled	80%	60
Pack horse, sumpter	80%	100
Horse train	25%	1,200
Mule	100%	8
Mule, dwarven	10%	25
Mule train (50 mules)	40%	800
Ox	90%	15
Wagon, armored	10%	2,500
Wagon, supply	50%	300
Wagon, covered	50%	500
Wagon, Kariv	10%	500

Table 1–5: Spring Travel Times and Costs (days on horseback/foot)

To	Barsella	Bemmea	Capleon	Cronepisht	Harkesh	Krakova	Nuria	Orkasa	Reth-Saal	Triolo	Valera	Vidim	Zobeck
From													
Barsella	—	9/12	23	35/39	35/44	26	32	45/48	27/52	22/28	20/26	35	31/37
Bemmea	9/12	—	25/32	45/69	39/48	18	34/41	48/58	50/61	27/37	25/36	26	29/43
Capleon	23	25/32	—	24/39	16	29/38	11	26	28	11	9	41/55	20/30
Cronepisht	35/39	45/69	18/32	—	14/21	27/41	8/13	11/16	10/18	12/20	22/34	17/24	8/16
Harkesh	38	39/48	16	18/32	—	18/23	12	4	6	19	17	25/30	17/31
Krakova	26	18	29/38	14/21	18/23	—	30/35	14/19	16/21	20/32	22/34	8	6/11
Nuria	32	34/41	11	27/41	12	30/35	—	16	18	16	15	40/48	32/54
Orkasa	45/48	48/58	26	8/13	4	14/19	16	—	2	14/19	31/35	18/25	6/12
Reth-Saal	47/52	50/61	28	11/16	6	16/21	18	2	—	29/33	33/37	13/23	8/14
Triolo	22/28	27/37	11	7/12	19	20/32	16	29/33	29/33	—	2	32/45	16/21
Valera	20/26	25/36	9	12/20	17	22/34	15	31/35	33/37	2	—	34/47	14/25
Vidim	35	26	42/55	17/24	25/30	8	40/48	18/25	13/23	32/45	34/47	—	10/18
Zobeck	31/37	29/43	20/30	8/16	17/31	6/11	32/54	6/12	8/14	16/21	14/25	10/18	—

SPRING TRAVEL TIMES

Estimated travel times are listed in Table 1–5, using swift horseback and ship travel first and then travel by foot, mule train, or slow cart over poor roads and wilderness; more settled regions allow faster travel. Estimates can vary wildly from actual time required due to prevailing winds, inclement weather, terrain, road conditions, or any number of reasons due to locals and the access and availability of transport. None of these travel times include use of magical conveyances or deep magic such as shadow roads or catslide alleys.

All blue routes with a single number are largely or entirely waterborne. Sea or river travel is included to minimize time for some entries.

Assume all ship routes cost at least 5 gp/day for a single trusted passenger through safe waters, 8 gp/day (or more) for dangerous waters. Costs triple if also transporting a mount, and quadruple if the mount is a warhorse.

Trade Fairs

Each summer and until harvest time, the various free cities and larger merchant towns gather at great market fairs, many of them specializing in particular goods: cloth and dyes, leathers, livestock, ironwork, scrolls and religious icons, or various special foodstuffs such as ale, wine, cheeses, or fish.

TABLE 1–6: TRADE FAIRS

Place	Month/Date	Specialty
Bemmea	Midwinter	arcana, cantrips, familiars
Birch Fairgrounds	Last Leaf	elf work, herbs, nuts, *memory philters*
Bourgund	Redleaf	perfumes, silks, lace
Capleon	Goldflower	fish, tea, salt, spice
Cronepisht	High Summer	horses, oxen, sheep
Friula	Sowing	books, dyes, pearls, scrolls, vellum
Krakovar	Midsummer	amber, fish, horses, blood coins
Kubourg Cantonal	Goldflower	cheeses, tools, wool
Maillon	Harvest Tide	alchemy, ceramics
Melana	Mustering	armor, knives, weapons
Triolo	Thunders	glass, spices, sailcloth
Trombei	Last Leaf	beer, horses
Salzbach	Redleaf	dyed leathers, salt
Zigistad	Goldflower	metals, wine
Zobeck	Midsummer	clockwork, fine weavings, jewelry

Bemmea, Gathering of Thoth-Hermes: The Bemmean midwinter fair of arcanists and bookbinders. Caters to mages, wizards, and other arcanists, with a smattering of priests of Thoth-Hermes.

Birch Fairgrounds, Birch Queen's Fair: Deep in the Summer Lands side of the Arbonesse Forest, with an entrance somewhere along the Neurabon River, the Birch Queen's Fair buys and sells everything from cantrips and cloaks of elvenkind to memories, skills, and luck. A dangerous fair for those who are not wary. The shadow fey are often in attendance.

Bourgund, Rose Knight's Emporium: A mixture of the ephemeral and the magically infused, this is perhaps the most volatile and fleeting event of this kind, involving perfumery, fey magic, dueling, the honor of the houses of Dornig, and the swaggering strength of the alchemists of Maillon. Banditry is common just outside Bourgund's borders before and after the event.

Capleon, Baron's Trade Fair: Spices, salt, tea, and more trade hands at the Baron's Fair. Notorious for espionage, intrigue, and assassinations.

Cronepisht, Horse Trade: Livestock of all kinds are sold at the fair in Cronepisht, primarily sheep, oxen, and cattle but also monsters such as winter wolves, double eagles, dogmoles, and even some familiars. The most exotic animal market outside Harkesh, Mhalmet, or Nuria.

Friula, Scribe's Fair: In spring, the Friulans play good hosts (for once) and invite the world to buy their pearls, dyes, books, and scrolls. Visitors can bring books or scrolls to sell; it's an easy way to make some money in Friula.

Krakovar, Farmer's Fair: The fair deals in fish and horses, amber and birchbark, linen, honey, and much more from the Krakovan villages. A rival to the Zobeck Midsummer Fair, but catering to the Northlands and (recently) to the Morgau knights and troops.

Kubourg Cantonal, Dwarfmoot: Much more than a trade fair, the Kubourg Cantonal fair features dwarven ironwork, mercenary hiring and equipping, cheeses, woolens, and blades galore. It also provides court rulings on matters of cantonal law, the election of hall chieftains, an occasion for bride-prices and wergild to be paid, and raucous masses to Ninkash (which outsiders might consider drunken beer hall fights).

Maillon, Alchemist's Gatherum: The strange folk of Maillon wait until after the harvest and then sell all the potions they have left before winter sets in. Some remarkable concoctions are available, as well as many frauds. A side trade in ceramic containers and copperwork has grown in recent years.

Melana, Armoring Fair: The smiths of Melana sell a great deal of iron and weapons to their cantonal cousins each year, and equally as much to the mercenaries of the Seven Cities. The whole city reeks of oil and iron for days.

Triolo, Fleet Fair: The Fleet Fair started as a way to equip Triolan ships and merchants of the Middle Sea with sailcloth and rope. Now the Triolans sell a great deal of spice and glass as well. Traditionally held on Sphinx Island at the harbor entrance.

Trombei, Golden Ceres Fair: If you don't care about ale and horses, you have no reason to visit Trombei for this fair. If these topics hold your interest, nowhere else offers as much horseflesh and as many nights of drunken revelry.

Salzbach, Salt Fair: The salt of Salzbach sells to the highest bidders in the autumn of each year, and taken on the roads before winter sets in. A quiet, mercantile fair with little carousing and a lot of money changing hands.

Zigistad, Wine Week: Vintners sell barrels of wine, dwarves sell ingots of ore, and everyone goes home happy. A rather rowdy festival in a devout city, sometimes leading to brawls and arrests. Centaurs are explicitly not welcome. Elfmarked priests of Baccho sometimes see it as a good place to preach the tenets of that fading faith, and hold at least one Drunkard's Mass during the week.

Zobeck, Midsummer Fair: Featuring the finest weaving, the most outrageous jewelry and clockworks, and sometimes a flying city visiting from Sikkim. The Zobeck Fair is a spectacle like no other, and recently, the shadow fey have brought moonsteel weapons and *memory philters* to sell at the fair. On rare occasions, the Griffon Knights auction a surplus griffon egg.

Major Festivals

As a relief from the toil and danger of daily life, the holidays of the calendar mark a series of festivals, rites, and occasional processions meant to signal the changing seasons, to mark great times of victory, and to give the pious an occasion for reflection and the discharge of their duties to the gods.

New Year's Dawn

At the first sign of spring comes the New Year, when the light of Lada the Golden drives away evil spirits, or when mages' fireworks do the same. The holiday begins in the early hours with a procession to the town center, and then waiting to see the sun rise over the horizon. As soon as it does, celebrants clang on pots and ring bells to drive out bad fortune and welcome good luck for the coming year.

Exchanges of gifts are common among family members, and many places have superstitions about what you can and cannot do on the first day of the year, such as keeping a full pantry, not leaving the house, or leaving a basket of food on the doorstep the night before.

Mustering Days

The campaigning season starts early in the spring (especially in the Seven Cities) and the mustering is the day when soldiers must report to their captains, captains to their lords, and lords to their kings. It is a day of oaths, calling up of peasant levies, and launching a season of raids, war, and commerce. The holiday stretches over three days: one to travel to the festival, then a day for swearing of oaths and contracts, then a day of blessings and prayer to Mavros before the march to war. The holiday is widely celebrated in the Magdar Kingdom, Bourgund, Verrayne, and Melana, and serves as an initiation for young warriors, who fight "Mustering Bouts" against each other to crown a "Chosen of Mavros."

The holiday's variable date is declared by the local priest of Thor, Perun, or Mavros. Given weather and climate, the dates of the holiday depend on the condition of the roads and rivers. In the sunny south, Mustering can take place in the first week of Springmelt (or even the last week of Deep Winter). In the north, Mustering rarely takes place in Springmelt, and the holiday more often ocurs in the first or second week of Sowing.

RITES OF SPRING

The priests of Yarila and Porevit, druids, village elders, or wise women oversee the festival of sowing and fertility on the equinox. The priests bless the fields and the flocks and pray for their health and a successful harvest. The devout spread wine and sometimes lamb's blood on the fields, and young courting couples hasten to the fields after dark to plant seeds of their own.

The Spring rites are a little more dangerous in the Mharoti Empire, in the form of the Egg Festival. Dragons retreat from their usual haunts to guard their nests, while their vassals and supporters keep a week-long vigil that ends with the Hatching Day, a day of joyous celebration when young kobolds, dragonborn, wyverns, drakes, and even true dragons are said to have their first birthday. Indeed, many do hatch around this time, though rarely precisely at the spring equinox.

The second day of the Rites of Spring is the Day of Misrule. On this day, a child is pronounced high priest or crowned king or queen. To celebrate the festival, a child wears a crown or full priestly regalia and makes pronouncements that adults seek to fulfill, though often the commands lead to a day of chaos and confusion. The festival is especially popular in the Seven Cities, the Magocracy of Allain, and the Grand Duchy of Dornig.

CROWN FESTIVAL

Most nations celebrate the birth or coronation of a noble ruler. The Greater Duchy of Morgau honors the coronation of Prince Lucan some 300 years ago and his recent ascension as king in Goldflower, with the gift of 12 comely maidens to his court from the people of the realm. The Mharoti Empire observes the Pact Day of the first dragons and the Founder Mharot by the rendering of tribute to the dragons by their people, and renewing their oath of alliance to the sultan. In the Magdar Kingdom, the queen gives loaves and olives to all visitors to her palace during the Crown Festival.

SUMMER FESTIVAL

A festival of warmth, trade, oaths, and friendship, the Summer Festival occurs at a crossroads or fairground at the solstice. The Summer Festival is a popular time for marriages and betrothals, horse trading, and fair dealings with strangers and old friends alike. Priests of Volund are especially sought after to bless anvils and livestock, hold funds for wagers, and negotiate marriage contracts. The festival overwhelms trade for a day in hubs such as Triolo, Capleon, Salzbach, and Zobeck.

HARVEST DANCES

In the bright harvest moonlight, after the sheaves are gathered and the threshed grain is stored in the granaries, farmers celebrate with dances late at night. Dancing, gambling, and merriment prevails, and music, foot races, and even magical fireworks are sometimes part of the celebrations. The festival takes different forms in every nation, but all peasants and nobles count their blessings at the end of the growing season and give thanks to Ceres or Ninkash or Baccho. Shops, workshops, guildhalls, and smithies all close during the harvest dances, and only taverns, inns, and shrines are open.

LANTERN FESTIVAL

A month after the winter solstice, when the night is dark and spring seems most distant, the people celebrate the returning sun with a parade of lanterns and candles. They send prayers to Lada, Khors, and Aten in elaborate ceremonies involving candles, lanterns, illumination magic, and sometimes lantern or candle drakes. A torchlit or candlelit singing parade might wind its way around an entire town as part of the Lantern Festival; other places send small floating lights into the sky as part of a solar mass. The festival ends early for children, and at dawn for the priests and the devout who maintain a vigil through the night.

MINOR FESTIVALS

These minor festivals are celebrated only in parts of Midgard or are not celebrated every year.

AXE FESTIVAL: A rare festival held during the red moon of a lunar eclipse, the Axe Festival is a propitious time to sacrifice to Hecate or (for those of darker bent) to Marena, the Red Goddess. Blood rites, kidnappings, and ritual torture can mar the celebrations, but some wizards and witches swear by the festival's power when crafting new magical items.

BEAR KING'S CHALLENGE: Each year in Björnrike, or in the fey lands near it, the Bear King calls the strong and the wise to a set of challenges. Each year the challenges vary somewhat, with old contests and new, and each year the winner of the contests is crowned as the King of Bears—and some say, is transformed into one of the bearfolk! It is a festival much recounted in song and fey poetry, though the actual gathering is smaller than some.

Ghost Night: Also called Hag Night, this goblin festival is honored with masks, invocations of the elders, and candle offerings. The Ghost Night is the first new moon of the winter, when things are their darkest. Some celebrants smoke or offer requiem at this time, and seek answers from departed elders.

Night of Open Roads: The first winter moon is a time to communicate with ancestors and spirits of the dead. This festival is especially sacred to Charun, Lord of the Dead. It is also an unusually good time to travel to the Shadow Realm, to open portals, and to build secret shrines or to raise the dead, and thus it is beloved of necromancers. The festival's celebration is especially common in Dornig and the Seven Cities.

Slaughter Festival: Also called the Brewer's Festival, the Slaughter Festival focuses around meat and drink: the autumn butchering plus drinking the first ale of the season, overseen by the clergy of Ninkash. Animals are smoked or salted for the winter, and the best beer is chosen by the goddess (or her priests). Trombei holds the largest celebration of the Slaughter Festival. Priests of the Hunter celebrate as well, though generally only in the dark woods; stories claim their sacrifice is always a grown man or woman, hunted through the forests, their boiled bones left on the Hunter's altar.

LEY LINES AND SHADOW ROADS

Midgard's ley lines make it a place where magic is, if not common, at least part of the landscape and often a source of feuds, investigation, and mystery.

Two of the strongest of these tools are the ability to use ley lines to expand and empower spells (see *MHH* for details) and to use them to cover great distances. The second of these tools are the shadow roads, called the fey roads in Dornig and among the elves. They are roads to travel not through the mortal world, but along mystic channels of power through the Shadow Realm, covering hundreds or even thousands of miles in days.

Long ago, the elven arcanists drove their mystic passages through the dark wood and forbidding tunnels of Shadow. They drove back the shade hounds and other strange beasts, laid down walls and river passages, and forged mithral bridges across bottomless chasms. At the height of their empire they passed through Shadow at will, as readily as a human might cross a drawbridge. But there were things in the moat that is Shadow, waiting.

Ley Lines

Ley lines are the scales of Veles, the bones of the world, the blood that makes Midgard live and makes its magic strong. They are invisible rivers of power, and the connecting elements of shadow roads and ancient wards as well as the spells of liches and the living. Put another way, ley lines are the sources used to power fey roads, but not every ley line is necessarily a road. Most small ley lines lack the power to sustain a major or permanent road. The exceptions are the strongest and most titanic ley lines, and some few ley lines made to open as shadow roads by the cunning of the shadow fey or the elves.

Ley lines empower magic both arcane and divine in most places across the face of Midgard. They are invisible to normal sight, but to certain experienced spellcasters (see *MHH*) ley lines are visible as glowing strings or bands of light. Despite their power, ley lines are not universal: some regions have no ley lines to speak of (such as the Western Wastes), and in others they can be difficult to find (ley lines are notoriously rare underground).

Ley lines are marked on the world map as lines of lighter color over the sea or land. Many have particular names and a specific appearance to the arcanists who work with them and the travelers who use them as magical roads.

Classifying Ley Lines

Ley lines come in three varieties: weak, strong, and titanic. Weak ley lines are found almost everywhere; they whirl on the wind, burble along streambeds, and spring forth from standing stones and ancient trees. Crossroads sometimes draw weak ley lines, as do bridges.

Weak ley lines are not found inside consecrated holy or unholy buildings or on freshly plowed earth, however. This suppresses their function for a time, but ley lines generally return when the temple falls or when rain or plant growth restores some vital element to the soil.

Strong ley lines are found in places of magical reputation, which often coincide with locations settled by elves, dragons, and other magical races. These are found on hilltops, river confluences, stone circles, druid groves, elven ruins, deep canyons, rocky spires, and similar places.

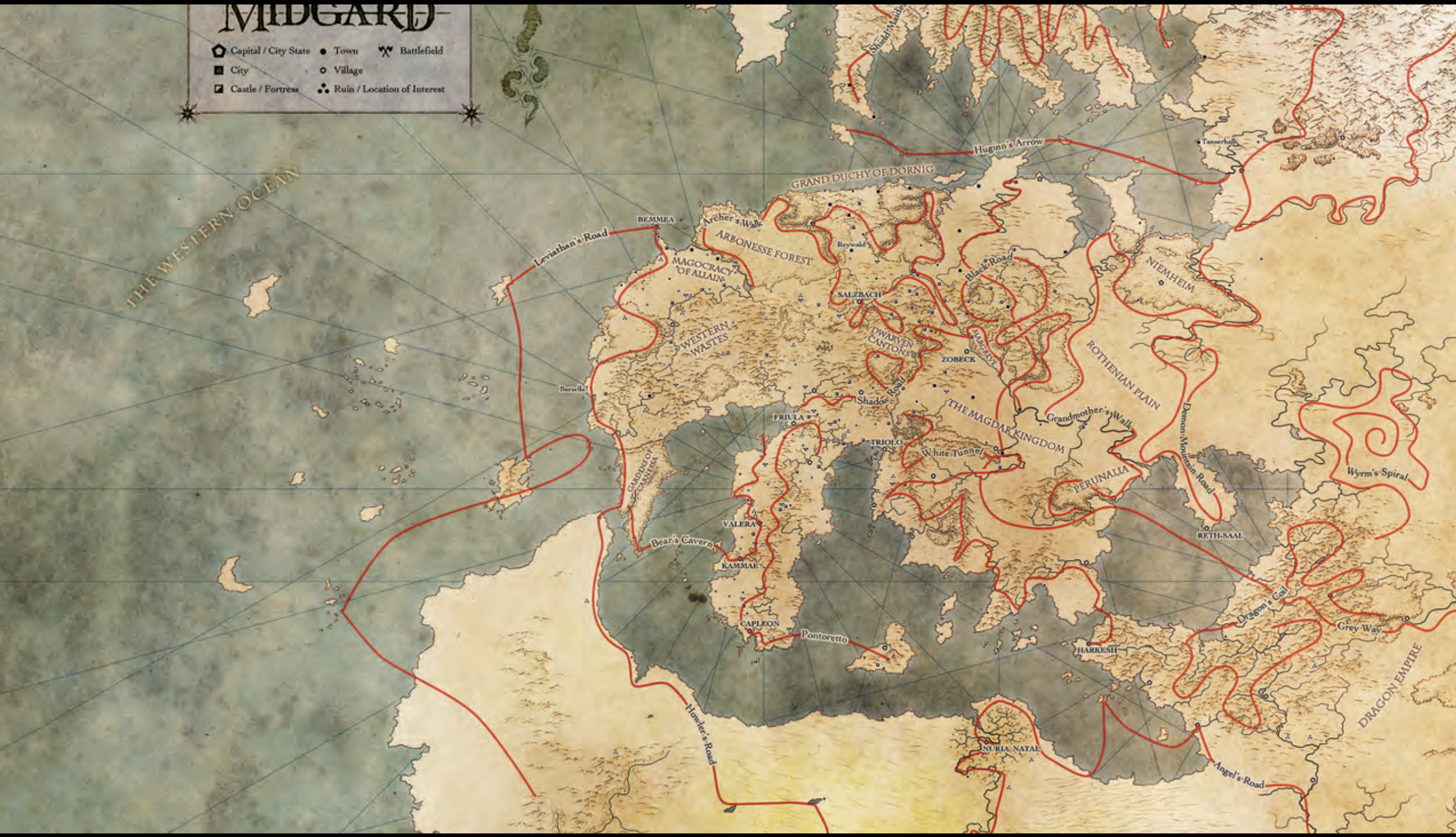
Titanic ley lines are very rare and sometimes fleeting. They are found in distant places, in the hearts of great temples, and in other special locations such as the Tower of Boreas. Natural wonders such as the peaks of enormous mountains, towering cliffs, volcanoes, forest heartlands, or a glacier's heart are often anchors. Greater demons, elder dragons, and other creatures of awesome power often make their lairs along titanic ley lines to further augment their magical might.

For further rules governing ley lines, see *MHH*.

Each kind of ley line has specific ratings and power levels. Weak ley lines can only empower or affect cantrips and spells up to 3rd level, strong ley lines can power up to 6th-level spells, and titanic ley lines can empower spells of all levels. They enable the user to strengthen magic in various ways, many of them familiar to arcane casters, others entirely new. Though the effects are extremely useful, they function only when empowered by the hidden light of the ley lines themselves—some regions have no ley lines, not even weak ones.

Named Ley Lines and their Character

Ley lines are roads, sources of power, and links between the mundane world and other planes, primarily the Shadow Realm. Here are more than a dozen of the best-


MIDGARD
Capital / City State
City
Castle / Fortress
Town
Village
Battlefield
Ruin / Location of Interest
THE WESTERN OCEAN
Leviathan's Road
BEMMEA
Archer's Walk
ARBONESSE FOREST
MAGOCRACY OF ALLAIN
WESTERN WASTES
Barsella
GRAND DUCHY OF DORNIG
Huginn's Arrow
Tanserhall
Reywald
SALZBACH
Black Road
NIEMHEIM
DWARVEN CANTONS
ZOBECK
ROTHENIAN PLAIN
Shadow Road
FRIULA
TRIOLO
THE MAGDAR KINGDOM
Grandmother's Walk
White Tunnel
Demon Mountain Road
PERUNALIA
Wyrm's Spiral
GARDENS OF ...
VALERA
Bear's Cavern
KAMMAE
RETH-SAAL
CAPLEON
Pontoretto
HARKESH
Dragon's Coil
Grey Way
DRAGON EMPIRE
Howler's Road
NURIA NATAL
Angel's Road

known ley lines and roads, each one strong enough to have a given name and a particular character.

Angel's Road: With connections to the River Nuria over the Gidigiga Hills to the east, this titanic ley line serves the god-kings of Nuria Natal as well as the angelic rulers of Ishadia. It burns with fiery light and heat and resembles a desert of endless, whispering sands—with occasional caravanserais inhabited by genies, elemental spirits, angels, and demigods.

Archer's Walk: Well kept by the elves, the outer ley line of the Grand Duchy of Dornig always seems a forest of shadows, eerie bird calls, and rustling leaves. Shadow fey, monstrous giants, and other creatures are more common than they once were, but the fey portals leading in and out are secured in the various elven keeps and houses.

Bear's Cavern: Connecting the western Seven Cities with the ruins of Al-Rassor, the Bear's Cavern resembles a series of enormous caves, underwater rivers, and canyon paths. It is said that an illusory or dream version of Al-Rassor still stands within the Shadow Realm side.

Black Road: Surrounding Morgau and passing through the Margreve, the Black Road is a nighttime forest where owls and larger predators are always on the prowl. A very powerful but extremely dangerous shadow road yet quite tame for druids and the undead, who find it congenial and full of talkative forest animals, from bats to foxes and from bears to deer and fireflies.

Demon Mountain Road: Corrupted at its source at Demon Mountain, this is a ley line that Rothenian shamans tap but rarely dare to traverse. Filled with haunts, spirits, devils, demons, and undead centaur ghosts, the Demon Mountain Road is said to contain the souls of all those killed by the Master of Demon Mountain over the centuries. Extremely friendly to necromancers, diabolists, and blood mages, who often find their magic amplified or enhanced in some fashion by this ley line.

Dragon's Coil: The heart of Mharoti elemental magic, this ley line powers most of the larger magical workings of the Dragon Empire. Dragons feud over lands where its rivulets move, and its various portals are all controlled by the morza and timarli, just as the portals in Dornig are controlled. It is a very safe set of roads—for the dragonkin. Jambuka are forbidden from traveling the Dragon's Coil, and some dragonkin mutter that they should not even foul it by seeking its strength for their hairy, foreign magic.

Fortune's Road: The favored ley line of the wandering Kariv east of Hugigrad is often empty, but sometimes entire clans of Kariv are found on it with one of their leaders, taking a shortcut or taking their chances. The shadow road is used by ravenfolk or even centaurs; journeys along it by outsiders or poor geomancers take months, years, or even decades. Occasionally, it is said, a young man stumbles off Fortune's Road to meet his son or daughter—who is much older than he is!

Grandmother's Walk: Baba Yaga's favored ley line serves her and her daughters and servants and is home to a variety of walking trees, enormous terrorizing birds, and other peculiar creatures. Anyone found using it as a shadow road had best be quick and stealthy. Grandmother is not especially fond of trespassers, though she seems to have some agreement to allow certain Perunalians and members of the Runkestad College access to the Walk in return for access to the Grey Way or other services.

Grey Way: A peculiar, foggy, and difficult ley line to walk as a shadow road, it connects Valogrod, the old Summer Gardens of the elves, Reth Saal, and Cogelu. Its power seems muted and visitors believe that the gnomes or shadow fey have hexed it in some way to make passage along it slow.

Howler's Road: From Corremel to Saph-Saph to Cindass, this ancient shadow road always resembles a series of stately homes, oases, barge canals, and gardens, making it a much cooler and more civilized journey than a camel-back trip or even a flying carpet. However, mages and geomancers drawing on the Howler's Road are always overwhelmed by the urge to howl their spells rather than merely speaking them, giving the ley line its name.

Huginn's Arrow: Along the Nieder Straits, the Arrow connects the small northlands kingdoms and is extremely popular among the bards of Skaldholm and among the ravenfolk. Together, these two groups keep it largely safe, driving out shadow creatures, trolls, and snow goblins who occasionally seem to gather magical power at one of its rivulets or portals.

Leviathan's Road: Out in the distant ocean for much of its length, the Leviathan's Road is knotted up by Bemmean runes and is also a cold, icy place for sections of its journey. Those geomancers who call on its power often complain that their bones ache from the cold of it.

Loki's Bridge: Circling around the isle and north to the giant and troll lands, Loki's Bridge is a cold road used by trollkin, bearfolk, dwarven shamans—and giants and valkyries. Most who open one of its portals complain of the snow and cold. A few claim that items are stolen from their packs or pockets each time they travel the bridge.

Lotus Road: From Mhalmet to Shibai and the East, the Lotus Road is a reasonably safe path for the powerful, and much less so for the poor and weak. It is said to devour some arcanists and travelers if its rituals are not performed correctly; others claim that a corrupt archmagi simply kills a few travelers each year to keep traffic down past the Jade Tower, a landmark that always appears halfway through a Lotus Road journey. Conjurers and geomancers drawing on its power always smell flowers and fresh breezes; the ley line is thought to hold a secret path to the Seven Heavens.

Pontoretto: Through the heart of the Seven Cities, this ley line is said to have been favored by the Valeran elves and to have provided a direct link to the Summer Lands of Silendora. That link is long broken, but the ley line is well kept and strong, a testament to the work of elven geomancers centuries ago.

Raven's Road: From Trollheim to Vidim to Domovogrod, this well-kept ley line serves many shapeshifting shamans, human wizards, and trollkin spirit talkers—but its true masters are the ravenfolk, who patrol it, watch over it, and keep it safe from shadow fey, winter monsters, and giants. It is said that the Raven's Road is also connected to Valhalla, or at least that a branch of it waters Yggdrasil.

Red Road: A ley line largely exhausted from constant use in powerful magic, it trickles from Uqmal to Xirdalan and east to Khandiria. Khandirians and Mharoti and Ishadians have used it for battle magic in the Red Wastes, and little is left of what was once a ley line celebrated in epic verse and memorialized as the "Great River of the True Kings." Now cracked obelisks mark its usual course, but some geomancers claim it is fading entirely.

Scholar's Path: A strangely serene road filled with roiling clouds, peculiar trees, and a host of runes scratched on every stone and wall. Thought to be somehow influenced by the dragon-dreams of Mharot, and sometimes noted as a tributary or lesser ley line lined to the Dragoncoil. Relatively safe for dragonkin of all kinds, much less so for the furred races.

Shadow Road: Deeply connected to the Shadow Realm and controlled by the shadow fey, this ley line near Zobeck leads all the way through the cantons to Friula. Once beloved of both merchants and scholars, it is now primarily used to visit the court of the shadow fey, as its only certain destination is the Shadow Realm itself. Wizards and geomancers using its energy always feel a passing ennui, a sense of despair, and an urge to return to the graves of their loved ones; dark visions are common when drawing on this ley line, and those doing so often weep or sob if performing lengthy rituals or multiple spells in a single day.

Shield Maiden's Fancy: Said to be a passage that the valkyries favor, the Shield Maiden's Fancy is a difficult ley line to gather power from because of the way it often vanishes or surges under conditions of excess sun or storms. In addition, traveling it usually requires walking up a shadow path onto a glacier or mountaintop and then returning to a shore; the variation in height makes it quite challenging, even though encounters with thursir giants, winter wolves, or trollkin raiders on the path are rare.

SKY ROAD: A pure and rarely traveled road from mountains and rivers and the lakes in the Qaen Plain and along rarely seen mountains and hills. An avian race inhabits its upper reaches, and wind dragons sometimes lay their eggs along this ley line to give their offspring strength and arcane might.

THE PROCESSIONAL: Connecting the royal cities of Dornig, this well-kept road was once so safe that servants and humans could be sent through it. Now it is rather shadow-bent, with shadow-fey, marauders, and even undead found on its clean paths.

VOID PATH: Under a starry night and unfamiliar constellations, this dark road connects Tabur to Beldestan and is said to contain a Shadow Realm fortress built by Void Speaker cultists who would rather not spend time in the mortal world at all. It is dangerous to use; some claim it whispers and cajoles all those who draw from it, using the Void Speech to draw others to the Ebon fortress somewhere in its coils.

WHITE ROAD: Largely distant from civilized places, the White Road goes from the Magdar Kingdom through White Forest and the Mountain Marches into the Dragon Empire's lands of Rumela and Marea. It is one of the best ways for human spies to enter the Dragon Empire quickly, taking them near Harkesh in a few days. In the opposite direction, dragonkin forces could (and did) move troops into Illyria to aid in its conquest, avoiding border defenses.

WYRM'S SPIRAL: At its center are the ruins of the Tomb of the First Khan, said to contain an army of undead riders and their steeds. Its power spirals out across the plains, shifting and surging in summer while quiet and notably weaker in winter. Nomad geomancers claim tapping the Spiral for power feels like a "strong wind from the soul."

TRAVEL TIMES ON THE SHADOW ROADS

The time required to move hundreds of miles along the shadow roads is fairly swift but not instantaneous, and the better-kept and better-warded roads of Dornig (though in some mild disrepair) are far swifter than roads elsewhere.

For instance, it takes 1d3 days to pass from any major city in Dornig to the Court of the River King and 1d3 days to pass between any of the cities of Dornig (or from Dornig to Arbonesse Forest or to the various elven noble courts).

Outside Dornig, things are less certain. It takes 1d6 days if one is traveling from Dornig to someplace farther away (to another domain on the map—Dornig to Zobeck, for example), though the known and functioning gates are few and far between. The same is true of travel outside Dornig entirely, say from Nuria to Mardas Adamant on the Angel's Road.

Travel time expands to 1d12 if one is traveling to or from the Great Wastes since the disaster of the Mage Wars has warped these lands. Assume a minimum of 2d12 days to travel to the Southlands or lands east beyond the Dragon Empire.

TABLE 1–7: SHADOW ROAD LORE

Make an Intelligence (Arcana) check at a –5 penalty for non-elves and consult the table below.

DC	RESULT
1–5	You don't know how the shadow roads work.
6–10	Shadow or fey roads connect two points through magical travel. A spell or passphrase is often required to open one; elves, shadow fey, and the elfmarked seem to have an easier time on them than anyone else.
11–15	The start and end of a shadow road are set in advance, and the doors to them are never open long.
16–20	The destination of a shadow road can be changed but only by a fey. Otherwise, new destinations require obscure incantations or arcane tinkering.
21+	Some shadow roads are guarded, and others lead in only one direction.

In the Shadow Realm, the roads cross and recross. A skilled wizard or experienced shadow lord might move from place to place within the plane and between the planes, if he or she knows the correct passages.

To travel a fey road between locations, one must know the path. For most, this means a guide to make the journey between gates safe, but once a person has made the journey, he or she might follow the road later and lead others along the path. Certain fey magic (such as a *shadow road* spell or a magical item such as a *key of Veles*) allows movement among the gates or even permits shifting the entryways and exits of a road. In addition, some gates require specific spells to operate, or they are bound by magical conditions, such as only functioning on a full moon. As a general rule it takes 1–3 days to move between gates under normal conditions. But these are not normal times.

SIGHTS AND ENCOUNTERS ON SHADOW ROADS

Those who intend to travel along the shadow roads for adventure find it an overgrown chaos of hedge mazes, twisting passages, hollows, and delves—the specific character of each road may vary, but all are somewhat notorious for lacking wide vistas or straight paths. Travelers may leave the path and wander at will, but once they attempt to go home, it takes them 1d3 days to find their way. Many have never returned since those who step off the paths sacrifice any protection offered by the court or the Imperatrix, or even by warding stones or way markers placed by other hands. Shadow creatures, fiends, and celestials all use these roads for purposes of their own, and dislike competition.

In game terms, the shadow roads are filled with dangerous encounters. More powerful adventurers will attract more powerful creatures. Fey and undead are common as well as hounds of the night, marauder giants, and various other shadow beasts. In addition, the shadow fey guard some roads with their black stone keeps, from which they send their minions forth to prey on the unwary—or at least, collect tolls in the form of *memory philters* (see Appendix), scrolls, or silver.

Travelers using these arcane highways do so at their own risk.

MAGIC AND SCHOLARSHIP

At the forefront of passing along arcane knowledge, ancient languages, and an understanding of Midgard's place in the heavens are the magical colleges, which turn apprentices into archmages, and whose dusty tomes and bright wands are both potent weapons of war and great tools of understanding the world.

Famous Colleges of Magic

Midgard has dozens of schools of magic, almost all of them among human settlements and most of them taking candidates for study on the basis of status, arcane ability, and ability to pay or to serve a length apprenticeship (10–12 years is typical). The best-known and best-regarded colleges of magic include the following institutions.

Academy of Bemmea: Bemmea sustains more than 20 colleges of study, but the first among equals is the Academy of Bemmea. This academy operates without a physical building since it meets entirely in ad hoc spell creations such as magnificent mansions and other summoned domiciles. The greatest of these, the Peerless Collapsible Collegium, retains the academy's lavishly appointed refectory, libraries (it has three), classrooms, and even student quarters and a faculty hall. The students are taken by invitation only, and the scholars and tutors are appointed by the existing members.

The whole is a rather elite club, but it rewards ability and it tends to avoid accepting members of chaotic or evil bent. The Academy is rightly considered snobbish but extremely capable, and its graduates have a bit of intimidation working in their favor, since the current Exarch of Bemmea is their honorary provost. The actual day-to-day leadership is provided by Senior Lecturer Harman Lottbert, a wildly bearded bald man with a prodigious record of arcane research and a powerful inspiration to his students. The school specializes in glyphs, ley lines, wardings, enchantments, and conjurations.

Arcane Collegium of Zobeck: Small but highly influential, the Arcane Collegium rarely takes more than a few dozen students. Its fields of study are peculiar as well, with an emphasis on clockwork magic (sometimes called gear magic), dwarven forms of alchemy and divination, and the school of illumination, sometimes called star and shadow magic. It is led by Collegium Guildmaster Orlando, a wizard of deep insight and peculiar habits, prone to whimsy and to powerful intuition. Other masters of the collegium specialize in divination and illusion, but the outside world sees the Zobeck Collegium as both inventive and frankly bizarre, with little respect for the traditions and practices upheld elsewhere. At the same time, it's hard to argue with results, and the Arcane Collegium turns out excellent students with shocking regularity, keeping up with the much more cutthroat schools of Bemmea and Runklestad.

Bibliotori of Friula: Though they are usually described as "librarians" or "scholars," the Bibliotori are arcanists of one stripe or another, and many of them teach history of magic, summoning, divination, abjuration, and so forth. The leader of their library is Lynnean Verdia, Most Learned, Keeper of the Great Library—and her goal is the increase of knowledge through the acquisition of scrolls, codices, books, and folios of all kinds. Keeper Lynnean sponsors expeditions that the Bibliotori pay for and profit from, while those secretive Bibliotori retain their anonymity to do further research into natural and arcane wonders. The school is half exploratory and half secretive, and amasses hoards of information that it rarely shares.

Blood College of Doresh: This notorious college is led by the archlich Orgupash, one of the great allies of the vampire King Lucan of Morgau, and it exists to teach the control of wizardly and sorcerous power to the vampires, ghouls, and dhampir of Morgau and Doresh, with a sideline in promising humans who serve the Blood Goddess with full-throated fervor. The vile lessons specialize in necromancy, divination, and enchantments, along with transmutation and evocation.

College at Runkelstad: This riverine college on a small island produces some of the finest enchanters of Midgard, and it also does a fair business in abjuration, wardings, and bindings. Unlike many other arcane colleges, it does not offer special privileges to the children of its former students or to the wealthiest members of society. The apprentices and students must simply convince the teachers at the college that they show potential to both practice magic capably and to serve the Magdar Kingdom against the Mharoti and Morgau. The College at Runkelstad is more openly a function of the crown than most colleges, reflected in the fact that its arcanists gain their positions by royal decree. Their leader is Doctor of the Arcane Mariano Pretarza, a gray-haired woman with a great understanding of arcane tactics and the military application of magic.

Dragoncoil College: This elementalists' school in Harkesh is a much quieter affair than the brawling of the various monks and priestly orders in the streets. Most of its students are dragonkin and kobolds, though it accepts a few of the furred folk if they are promising enough. Hidden in four plain towers around a pigeon-infested courtyard, the main site of the college is a rather rich and modern building, with newly applied frescos and bright blue roof tiles. It is said that the college sits directly on an anchor point for the Dragon's Coil ley line (see page 40), though the dragons and dragonkin are silent on this point.

Fallen College of Caelmarath: Sometimes called the Invisible College, this infamous group was founded by a group of wizards and apprentices who survived the Mage Wars and agreed to meet 20 years later to restore the magic of their lost lands. They include necromancers, ooze wizards, astromancers, and diabolists. Widely considered an evil and malicious group, they use magical kidnapping, blackmail, and extortion to gather funds, and ally with the worst elements of magical practice in the Wastes and elsewhere. Their leader is the red-horned Truno Eldrepass (NE male tiefling wizard 11), a dandified fellow who also happens to be a close confidant (some say lover) of the Oracle of Kammae.

Hecate's Chambers: The function of magic and the arcane in the Oracle's state of Kammae Straboli is central to the function of government, and the Oracle depends on mages of several kinds to expand the power of Nethus and to work the will of Hecate. The school called Hecate's Chambers is both a seminary and an arcane collegium, and the two sides are not deeply separated. All students are at least nominally worshippers of Hecate, and all priests are familiar with the fundamental arcane principals of illusion, enchantment, and crafting of magical items. The keeper of Hecate's Chambers is the Black Chamberlain, Ustoros Trismagos (NE human male wizard 16).

Maillon Guild of Master Chemysts: This highly successful guild and the city are so tightly interwoven that they are often referred to in the same breath. Andress the Ageless, the eternally young leader of the Guild, ably leads the alchemists. They sell their wares in the Bottle Market in Maillon, and they also create remarkable numbers of potions and unguents and elixirs for trade via mule train or barge trade, shipping most of them to Bemmea and the Grand Duchy of Dornig. However, their distinctive pelican-stamped wax seals are found as far afield as Harkesh and Skaldholm, and the Tsar of Vidim is said to be a fan of their healing draughts and certain potions of strength and vitality.

As a teaching institution, there is no better place to learn the practice of alchemy in all its forms, and Maillon's master chymists are remarkably open to any and all students—as long as they can pay the fees, which range from 250 gp for the lowliest bottle-washing wretch to 5,000 gp a season for noble lordlings seeking to master the elements.

Great Linnorm House: While bards maintain their traditions at Skaldholm, and the druids have circles throughout the northern forests, arcane traditions are a little thinner in the North and largely directed by the dwarves and a few human and trollkin wizards at the Great Linnorm House, built with rafters taken from the bones of an elder dragon near Thunder Mountain. This great hall echoes the Northlander style, with beams of linnorm bone and runestones used in the curriculum. The forms of magic taught at Linnorm House are typically kept secret by its devotees, but seem to involve skinchanging and transmutation, as well as alchemy, magical smithwork, summoning and conjuration, and the uses of rune magic and grudge magic. Some of the female adepts taught at Linnorm House learn angelic magic as well.

Scolia Valeresh: Half a militant order devoted to the elven war god and half a school for war wizards and battle scions, the Scolia in Valera is led by First Fencing Master and Ley Adept Tikkalan Illuvitesh, who also styles himself the Last Knight of Valresh—the whole school tends to florid titles and lengthy descriptions of simple spells. Despite his outrageous hats and lacy shirts, Master Illuvitesh is deadly serious about the fusion of magic and martial traditions. Arcane archery is part of the standard curriculum, as are classes on various battles and arcane devotions to Mavros and the scourging of enemies through magical fire and sword. The Scolia Valeresh claims to be the only place where secrets of elven battle magic is still taught in Midgard.

Templeforge Alchemist's Guild: High in the mountains of the Ironcrag Cantons stands the Templeforge pilgrimage site, home to a handful of airships and the site where smiths and horsefolk alike journey in yearly summer pilgrimages to venerate the Hammer of Volund. Less well known is its school of alchemy and sorcery, for the dwarves of the Cantons are as fond of forge magic as any, and practice their share of evocation and elemental magic. The Alchemist's Guild is responsible for the various fiery trumps and dragonheads employed by cantonal dwarves, as well as their holy flaming oil, their flame-spewing wands, and a special form of enchanted jewels, the seer stones, that grant keen sight from mountaintops to great distances.

Thoth's Temple: The oldest school of magic in Midgard is Thoth's Temple in an oasis two days travel west of Nuria, which still functions as a shrine and pilgrimage site. Thoth's Temple outgrew its original religious charter, now featuring dozens of monumental halls, an army of ushabti servants, an enormous library of scrolls and tablets, and other wonders, including a mausoleum complex inhabited by several liches. Thoth's priesthood retains great influence over the curriculum and the selection of candidates during admission but leaves the instruction and pedagogy to a wizardly order separate from the priests. Their mastery of ley line magic is profound, and there is some speculation

that the Order of Thoth is attempting to build a flying city on the model laid down by Sikkim. This is one of the most prestigious magical colleges of Midgard, and its wizards are both feared and respected.

28 Common and Archaic Languages

Many languages are common in Midgard, with the following warranting further description. An educated or well-traveled adventurer might learn any of these languages.

1. Common: The most common language in the Crossroads and the Seven Cities. All characters speak it.

2. Aklo: The language of aboleths, derro, linnorms, gibbering mouthers, and other bizarre creatures of the underworld. Rarely heard on the surface.

3. Ankeshelian: A dead human language, more than 3,000 years old, whose runes and glyphs are still used in magical writing today.

4. Caelmaran: A very rare language, a human dialect of Infernal. Still spoken by the Master of Demon Mountain and a few wizards. Those who speak it gain a +1 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks with devils, demons, or other fiends once per day.

5. Darakhul: The language of the Ghoul Imperium, also called Ghoulish, Charun's Tongue, or Undercommon, is an offshoot of Common and can be partially understood by surface dwellers who have Intelligence of 15 or higher. It is widely spoken in Morgau and Doresh and by vampires and thus serves as the common tongue of the undead. Those who speak it gain a +1 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks with undead once per day.

6. Draconic or Mharoti: The language of drakes, dragons, and dragonkin in the Mharoti Empire. Rarely spoken by non-scaly races, it grants a +1 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks when communicating with such scaly creatures once per day.

7. Druidic: A degenerate form of Elvish mixed with Common. Rarely used outside religious ceremonies. Druidic can be spoken even when in animal form.

8. Dwarvish: One of the first languages, widely spoken in the Northlands, Krakova, and the Ironcrag Cantons. Older documents are written in a slightly different script called "Anvil Dwarvish" and can be difficult to decipher (typically an easy Intelligence check, depending on the topic and age of the document).

9. ELEMENTAL: The language of elemental creatures of fire, water, air, and earth. Related to Draconic.

10. ENOCHIAN: The language of the Celestial Sphere, spoken in Ishadia and among the Seven Heavens. Sometimes called Ishadian.

11. ELVISH: The language of the Elflands, the River Court, the Grand Duchy's Court, and elsewhere. Remarkably unchanged over the past 2,000 years. Documents in the precursor language, Old Elvish (also called Thornish), can still be read with some effort by characters with an Intelligence of 15 or higher.

12. FEATHER SPEECH (PINION): The silent language of the ravenfolk, spoken by the ruffling, position, and movement of feathers. Largely impossible for other races to speak unless aided by feathered fans, and even then, the effect is primarily comical.

13. GNOMISH: A dialect of Elvish with many words borrowed from Infernal. Those who speak it gain a +1 bonus to the DC of their illusions or enchantment spells once per day.

14. HUGINN'S SPEECH: The spoken language of the ravenfolk. Remarkably constant in the North among the huginn and in the South among the heru. Sometimes used as a thieves' cant.

15. ILLYRIAN: An archaic language, rarely used outside the court of Illyria and among nobles and now outlawed in the Dragon Empire's new province of Rumela. Those who speak it gain a +2 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks in the Seven Cities once per day, for it is considered a sign of noble status and personal tragedy.

16. INFERNAL: A planar language spoken by demons and devils.

17. KARIV: A dialect of Common, flavored with many borrowed words and bits of cant. Those who speak it gain a +2 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks with Kariv wanderers and centaurs once per day.

17. KHANDIRIAN: A human dialect related to Enochian, spoken in the East.

18. KHAZZAKI: An argot of eastern tongues, spoken only among the nomads.

19. KOBOLD: A somewhat simplified (some might say debased) dialect of Draconic, though most dragons and drakes pretend not to understand it.

20. MINOTAUR OR RUE-THOTHKA: The language of the minotaurs is complex and resonant and especially favored in the South. Its tones are guttural and dangerous sounding.

21. MORPHOI: The language of the Western Ocean and most aquatic races.

22. NORTHERN TONGUE: Also called the Rune Tongue or Giantish. A human language deeply related to Dwarvish and sharing many loan words.

23. NURIAN OR THE SOUTHERN TONGUE: A human corruption of Enochian, the divine language. A great deal of ritual magic is written in Nurian.

24. TROLSUNG: Related to the language of the giants, Trolsung has a quicker patter but retains the giantish love of riddles, kennings, and wordplay.

25. UMBRAL: The language of the shadow elves, a dialect of Elvish.

26. VOID SPEECH: The language of the outer darkness, Void dragons, and alien gods, a tongue not meant for humanoid speech at all. It disquiets those who hear it, and adds a +1 bonus to the DC of fear-related spells.

27. VOS'GHAEN: An ancient human tongue, related to Ankeshelian. Speakers of Vos'ghaen are often wizards and masters of glyph magic.

28. WHISPERIUM: A silent language common among gnomes and diabolists. If you know Whisperium, you may cast a spell silently once per day.

THE WORLD

The world of Midgard resembles a coin surrounded by a snake. The serpent is Veles, the Father of Serpents, who girds the edges of the earth. One face of the coin is the land most people know. The elves claim the obverse is the Bright Land, also called the Elflands, the Summer Lands, and the Fair Place. Here lies the homeland of the elves (and gnomes and other fey), a land both more magical and wilder than the known world.

Between the two sides of this coin lies the Shadow Realm. It is a land of grays and darkness untouched by Khors's lamp. It is a plane of long shadows and unending dusk. It is a land of nightmares in which the unready and unprepared can be lost forever. And it is not empty.

This shaded desolation was pierced by the magic of the elves, which allowed them to arrive in Midgard among the savage races living in the wreckage of Ankeshel. They wove a web of passages between their world and this one. These were the fey roads, built using the power of ley lines and strengthened by that magic.

THE SUN, MOON, AND HEAVENS

Midgard is geocentric, with the sun, moon, planets, and stars swiftly circling the world. Beyond that, strange other worlds link to Midgard through dark roads, both sullied heavens and golden hells.

The sun is the chariot of Khors the sun god, or of Aten the sun god, or perhaps a lamp of one of the other cults of the sun. When it disappears, it presumably shines on the other side of the flat world. As the sun passes the edge of the world, some believe that the World Serpent snaps at it, someday to consume its light and plunge the world into the eternal darkness of Fimbulwinter.

Midgard has a single, primary moon and seven lesser moons called the Mage's Stars, used as a common symbol in arcane workings and in the coat of arms of the

Magocracy of Allain. The moon is called just that, though some wizards and sages call it Ond or Selles, names in older languages also meaning "the moon."

Midgard stars are living creatures, lesser lights to the sun god's greater light. A young star might require someone to defend it from the dark gods who would happily devour it. On rare occasions, these stars come down from the heavens to visit people on the face of the world.

Five known planets orbit the world of Midgard, though elves insist on the existence of a sixth planet, called Idelitan or Melgros, that human eyes are too weak to see.

Asaph, the Green Planet: A planet that shines white and green, Asaph is rumored to hold powerful influence over the seas and air, and alchemists associate it with elemental air, mithral, and spirits.

Ermaon, the Jumping Planet: Fastest and strangest of the planets, small and difficult to see. Some believe it is not a planet at all but a comet trapped in a circle or a lost court of the far-wandering shadow fey trapped in a chaotic spiral. Alchemists associate Ermaon with silver or mercury.

Melgros, the Dark Wanderer: Not visible to the human eye, this planet is a dark and mysterious home of malevolent forces, including nightshades, demons, and devils of all sorts. Stories dating to Ankeshelian times claim it is the source of both a soul-consuming fire and all black magic. Elves refer to it as "Idelitan" or "the Archer's Planet" because those who see it happen to be the best archers. Alchemists associate the planet with adamant.

Temperos the Giant: A yellow planet, easy to see in the night sky and commonly linked with the giants of the Haunted Lands. Those giants held it to be the home of the gods and called it Gades, the All-Father, a name still used among savants, alchemists, and citizens of Bourgund. Alchemists associate it with copper, tin, and bronze.

Tiomoutiri, the Golden Planet: This bright and shining planet is most visible around sunrise and is widely connected with Khors the sun god and with Lada the Golden. Astronomers of Nuria Natal believe it governs the health and sexual aspects of life. Priests of Khors and Lada perform their high rituals when Tiomoutiri is in the sky. Alchemists associate the planet with gold and orichalcum.

Zuhal, the Dragon: The elves claim that this red distant planet has rings. Though it is a powerful symbol in the heavens, living dragons relate it with blood and life force. Alchemists associate it with platinum, earth, and minerals, and Zuhal is widely considered the planet that controls aspects of magic and the arcane.

Planes and Hells

Most adventures occur in the mortal realm of Midgard, but sometimes devils, angels, and the heralds of the gods show themselves and offer greater horizons. These planes and hells are known to the people of Midgard.

Eleven Hells

Scholars frequently speculate about the links, if any, between Midgard and the Hells. Niemheim and old Caelmarath, the most debauched and diabolical of the magocracies, hold the highest likelihood of answers. Both nations have a history of connections to the 11 Hells, known as the Hells of Fire, Ice, Darkness, Styx-Lethe, Insects, Plague, Acid, Cannibals, Ignorance, Lies, and Blood. The exact list is disputed: sometimes Fire is described as Sulfur, Acid is called the Abyss, and the Hell of Cannibals occasionally the Hell of Decay or Putrefaction. Even the Hell of Blood is confused with the Plane of Spears (see Geirrhöth below). These planes are the homes of devils and demonic forces, and the common people of Midgard correlate the various supernatural evils as "the Eleven."

Evermaw, Plane of Undeath

Evermaw is confused with the Eleven Hells since it is an afterlife of ghouls and vampires, cannibals and gluttons. A road like a lolling tongue sprawls through a waterless desert of blood dust, passing towers that sprout like crooked white teeth until it's swallowed by the gulletlike sinkhole that houses the city of Vulture's Beyond, osseous capital of the Hunger God Vardesain as well as the Eternal Palace of the dry undead lord Mot and the Crystal Necropolis of the guardian god Anu-Akma. Here ziggurats flow with the blood of daily sacrifices, liches study new necromancies of flesh and bone, and the cooks claim they can skin and butcher anything, from ghosts to gods.

Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void

Far beyond other planes, connected to Midgard by only the most tenuous of twisting paths, is Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void, the Realm Beyond. Little can definitively be said of it, other than it harbors monsters and creatures of unspeakable evil, horrors such as nightshades, yithians, gugs, shoggoths, hideous Void dragons, spiders of Leng, hounds of Tindalos, the shining children of Caelmarath, and many more. Few wish to visit, but creatures from that distant and primordial realm seem eager to visit the mortal world. Dark gods from Addrikah to the White Goddess and from Chernobog to the Goat of the Woods seem at home in the Void, or at least draw power from it. The place does offer great power to those who swear their lives and souls to its causes, but those poor, deluded beings who listen to such offers rarely live to see any promised rewards.

KLINGEDESH, PLANE OF THE MARKETPLACE

Imagine a tangled nest in the branches of the World Tree, formed of stacked shops, stalls, nooks, and crannies radiating out in all directions, connected by bridges of rope, wood, and bone. It's a maze of commerce, friendly to all. Visitors can walk the entire way around and never see the same item twice. All things can be bought or sold here— for every faire, fete, and bazaar that ever was is a road to and from the Marketplace, and it connects to both the cities of Midgard and the festivals of the Fair Lands.

RAVATET, PLANE OF RUSTY GEARS

Every plane has its secrets, and the domain of Rava the Gear Goddess is no exception. A visitor can discover the dark side of the Mother of Industry and the Weaver while visiting her purgatories: the Desert of Rust, the Junkyard of Broken Cogs, and the Hall of Inevitable Fate. Boons and banes wait for those who dare explore the junk piles and haggle with the strange scavengers and exiles of the rusty gears. Other gods sometimes found here include Ptah, the Maker, as well as Volund and (strangely) the Hunter.

SILENDORA, SUMMER LANDS OF THE ELVES

Shining bright, the elves presumably retreated to the land of the Last Horn. Its elves hold great fairs and pay homage to kings and queens who speak with the River Lords of the Arbonesse. Their Birch Queen and Oak and Holly Kings are little more than names to mortals, but their silver halls and white horses can be glimpsed in dream or at the edge of the great forests of the world where the fey roads are still traveled and where the elven ambassadors sometimes come to call on the Imperatrix of the Grand Duchy of Dornig or the other elfmarked lords and ladies of the various fey courts.

VALHALLA, THE STORM COURT, AND GEIRRHÖTH

Home to Thor, the valkyries, and mighty Wotan, the Storm Court is where the Northern gods meet. Their hall and their battleground is said to have a glorious view onto the conjoined realm of Geirrhöth (GIRE-hoeth), also called the Plane of Battle or Place of Spears. Some believe that the best way to visit the Storm Court is to fly into a raging thunderstorm; few return from that road.

Some say Geirrhöth is a punishment for those who revel in killing, though most reavers and warriors hold that it is a warrior's heaven for the most valorous and bloodthirsty. All the triumph and tragedy of war rages here, a never-ending glory where the soldiers who die today rise again to rejoin their battle again tomorrow, watched over by archdevils, archangels, and all the gods of war, though Mavros is first and foremost. The rivers and rain run bloody, the dreadful sound of screams and war-cries echoes everywhere, and the many swords and spears scattered underfoot are the only ground to be found. When night falls, the ghosts of the slain arise to drink, feast, and restore their flesh and bone for the following day.

YGGDRASIL AND THE WORLD TREES

The first World Tree, Yggdrasil, is the seat of wisdom and a connecting element between Midgard, Valhalla, and all other planes. Wotan and the Northern gods hold the secrets of how to travel its twisting paths and how to evade its guardians. Yggdrasil is ancient and perhaps sentient; certain of its trails are easier to follow than others. Those who travel Yggdrasil between the worlds carry messages for the gods or bring omens and warnings.

The druids and elves agree that the Vanir elves—or Freyr and Freya themselves—planted the first seeds of Yggdrasil, which became the world and its many planes. Elven versions of this story say that Yggdrasil rests in the Summer Lands, and its roots and branches extend to Midgard, the Hells, and elsewhere. The druids and priests of Freyr and Freya claim Yggdrasil holds up Midgard and its offshoots form sacred groves and forests in the world.

The branches of Yggdrasil that enter Midgard manifest as World Trees that connect Midgard to various realms, from the Elflands to the Plane of Spears. Climbing a World Tree means entering the planar highways, which might lead to Valhalla, the Eleven Hells, or Ravatet. Only the elves, the ravenfolk, and valkyries even pretend to understand the paths, though the strange ratatosk native to the great tree act as guides, messengers, and guardians of its many planar roads.

The World Trees display roots as large as hills, and trunks pushing miles into the sky. Each tree's bark is wildly variable, with sections of beech-smooth bark alternating with convoluted layers of flaking material. Their leaves are enormous, yet when they fall they seem to rarely reach the ground, instead slipping though the worlds to Valhalla or Elfheim or elsewhere.

The known World Trees are all sites of pilgrimage for followers of the Northern gods, but they are revered almost everywhere they grow. Each such tree is a node of divine power and is a nemeton, a sacred grove where no birds nest and no animals dig their burrows. The leaves of each World Tree constantly shiver and whisper, even when no wind stirs the forest around them.

Druids and Northlands pantheon priests find their magic operates as if they were 1 level higher when they are within the sacred grounds of a World Tree.

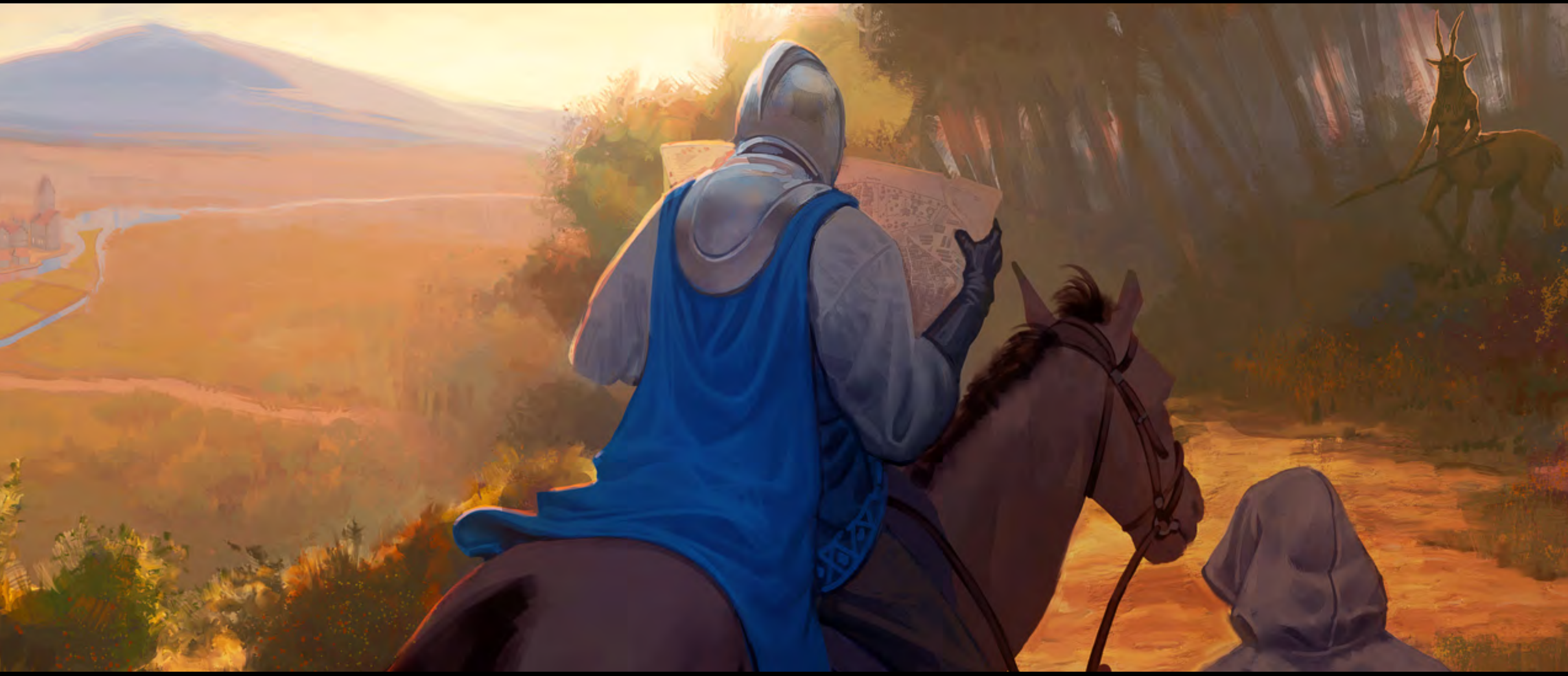
The known World Trees include an enormous fir in Domovogrod, an unusual tree in Beldestan, a marsh cypress in the Haunted Lands of the Giants, a mere sapling in Huldramose, and a thriving ravenfolk roost in Trollheim. Not all World Trees prosper or resist corruption: Varshava's tree did not survive the darakhul conquest of the city, the gnomes of Niemheim have created a terrible sproutling abomination, and a rotting World Tree endures in the ruins of Thorn.

ZOBECK AND THE CROSSROADS

2

The Free City of Zobeck shares borders with three nations: the dwarven Ironcrag Cantons to the west, the human Magdar Kingdom to the southeast, and the female-dominated Perunalia some distance downriver, at the mouth of the River Argent. Together, these regions and nearby areas including the Margreve Forest, the Smolten Hills, and the subterranean cities of the Ghoul Imperium (described in chapter 3) and Lillefor constitute the Crossroads of Midgard.

The regions of Midgard spin around the Crossroads like spokes around a wheel. Everything that goes from north to south and east to west passes along the River Argent, the Sultan's Road, the Great Northern Road, and other well-trod trade routes, all with their own difficulties and dangers. But the nations that thrive in the heartland know how to spin copper into gold and how to turn a sinking barge into a prince's ransom. Though they borrow language, customs, tools, and even gods from all their neighbors, the Crossroads have their own code, their own pride, and their own way of doing business. Welcome to the beating heart of the world.



CUSTOMS OF THE CROSSROADS

The Crossroads is a region of river towns and trade. Road patrols pursue the inevitable bandits.

The Crossroads region seems like a mishmash of cultures, but some customs are entirely unique to its people, including the styles of its great gatherings and its history of dwarven thralls.

GREAT GATHERINGS

The nations of the Crossroads traditionally gather once or more each year for great celebrations and times of judgment. These gatherings tend to vary by national character.

Daughter's Feast: On the years of her whims, the divine ruler of Perunalia invites all her people to the Daughter's Feast in the month of Redleaf. The feast takes place when all harvests are gathered and debts are paid and everyone is starting to prepare for the season of snows and winter raids from the Rothenian Plain. It is a last chance to hearten the people and celebrate. The Daughter's Feast is a smaller event than some of the other gatherings due to its autumn timing and the potential peril of its honored guests. It is held in a winter palace outside the city of Orkasa on an island in the River Argent.

Duchess Vasilka Soulay always invites her father, the god Perun, to the feast, and sometimes he attends. On those occasions, he arrives in a flash of thunder with some of his other children, such as his son Bacca (CN male demigod) by a Septime mother, and his youngest daughter, the centaur Fleremina Daughter (CG female demigod). Both of Vasilka's half-siblings are friendly enough, but they create difficulties for their host, so the feast is not held more than once every three years or so.

When Perun arrives with one or more of his wives (variously Marena, Lada, or Sif, depending on who you believe), things grow even stranger. In those years, the feasts are a time of madness, thunder run riot, great gifts, sudden deaths, and profound visions amid drunkenness and chaos. The normally practical women of Perunalia celebrate with great abandon, sometimes leading to great joy or sorrow.

Dwarfmoot: The Ironcrag dwarves have a reputation as staunchly independent, isolated except in matters of trade, and consider themselves superior to all lowlanders of any race or kind. The foes they respect most are dragons and their fellow dwarves. As a result, internal feuds within a clan or canton fuel many of the conflicts that occupy the cantons: a broken engagement, a conflicting mining claim, or a simple insult in a fit of drunken foolishness can be enough to stir dwarven blood to battle. The cure for this infighting is the Dwarfmoot.

Even the worst feuds rarely last more than a single year, because during the Dwarfmoot at the spring equinox at Bundhausen, under the stones of Locchistal, each recognized feud is brought forward to be weighed by all the cantons. To continue the feud, each side must pay a feudgeld. If both sides pay, the feud continues. If neither pays, the feud ends. If one pays, the money is given to the more peaceful side at the next Dwarfmoot.

Marriages, declarations of new chieftains, mustering for raids into the lowlands, and even the launch of new trade routes or airships are all announced at the Dwarfmoot. It is the stage and forum for all matters and disputes involving status and prestige among the dwarves. The Dwarfmoot takes place within 30 days of the passes opening in the spring, and the gathering sets the tone for the following year. Dwarven alliances with free mercenary companies are also forged here.

Knight's Call: The Order of the Storm and the Order of the Undying Sun both hold knightly gatherings in Perunalia at the White Citadel and in the Magdar Kingdom at the castle of Smoltenberg.

The less formal and more entertaining Knight's Call is clearly that of the Order of the Storm. Valkyries, women of Perunalia, dwarves from the Northlands, and riders from the Magdar Kingdom all attend, as do a few elfmarked from the Grand Duchy of Dornig. They boast, they brag, they swear great oaths to undertake raids against the Blood Kingdom's shroud-eaters, the worst of the centaur marauders, and undead holdings in the North, or they vow to slay trolls and giants by the score. Once the ale has ceased to flow and the Storm's Call ends, a few of these knights seek to impress their fellows by following through on their bragging. Others wisely disregard the more outrageous boasts.

Grand Marshall Lord Clarikon oversees the Order of the Undying Sun's gathering, where knights test their martial prowess and the order attends to the diplomatic reshuffling of its captains, turcopoles (mounted archers), provosts, commanders, and lords. New officers are commonly invited to meet the upper crust of the order; attendance for senior knights is mandatory at this gathering. In addition, the recruiting goals for the Sunset Companies are set at the Sun's Call.

Queensmeet: The Widowed Queen Dorytta of the Magdar Kingdom holds a great tournament called the Queensmeet once each year in the month of Low Summer at the fields outside Cronepisht. It is mandatory for her vassals to attend, but it is also a show of power and chivalry since Queen Dorytta invites prominent knights from Bourgund, Perunalia, Triolo, Trombei, Valera, Zobeck, and (less commonly) Capleon, Doresh, the Greater Duchy of Morgau, or Vidim. The Queensmeet Crown is a helmet set with a gold band and encrusted with garnets and a single shining ruby. Each year, the prior year's champion is expected to defend their title.

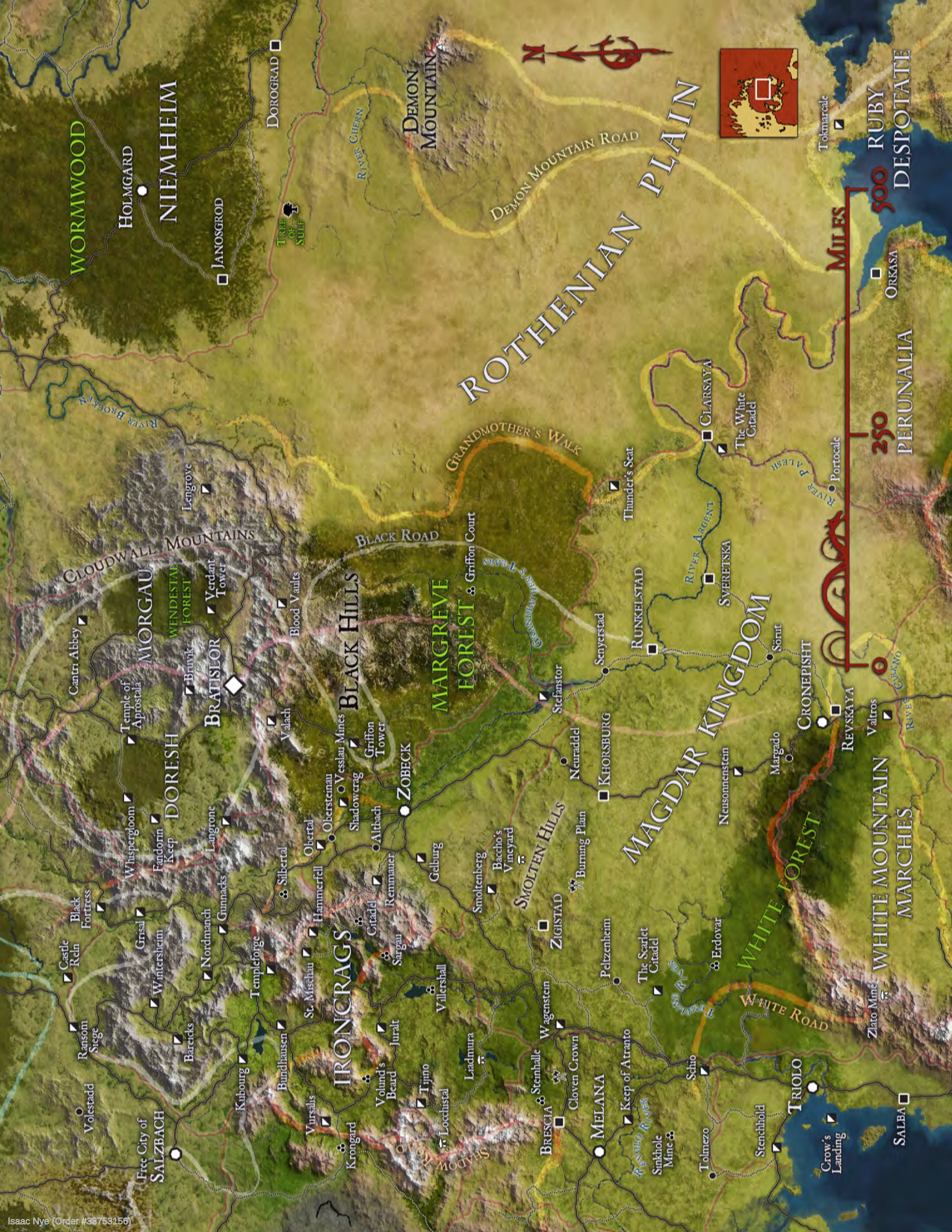
While the knights tilt and fight in the grand melee, courtships are underway, arranged marriages are solemnized in the eyes of queen and Khors, and ambassadors, merchants, and adventurers all find new opportunities. The Queensmeet can be attended profitably by wandering souls who have never held a lance.

DWARVEN THRALLS

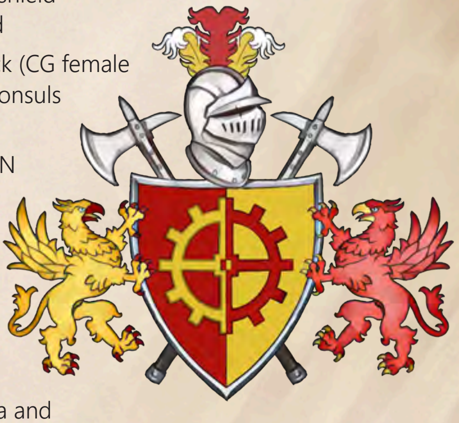
"Ten years under the mountain" is a common grievance among those who visit the Ironcrags against their will and survive. The dwarves ransom other dwarves for a fee in gold, but they hold members of all other races captured in war for 10 years of captivity. Not long for a dwarf, perhaps, but an age for a human or halfling.

The dwarves raid the lowlands, especially the Seven Cities, Magdar Kingdom, the Blood Kingdom, and Zobeck, but sometimes they assault Bourgund or even Dornig. These raids aim to take prisoners or lay siege to rival cities and are deadly earnest affairs, resulting in significant losses of prisoners, deaths, and dwarven blood. Most such raids happen in the spring and summer months before the harvest. Reciprocal raids against the dwarves in their mountains are nearly universal failures.

Why do they do it? The dwarves take their thralls in war, others say, as a way of discouraging their enemies.


WORMWOOD
Holmgard
NIEMHEIM
Janosgrod
Dorograd
Tree of Sulf
River Chern
Demon Mountain
Demon Mountain Road
ROTHENIAN PLAIN
N
Tokmarcale
RUBY DESPOTATE
Miles
250
500
Orkasa
PERUNALIA
Clarsaya
The White Citadel
River Palesh
Portocale
Grandmother's Walk
Thunder's Seat
River Broken
Lengrove
Cloudwall Mountains
Black Road
Griffon Court
Grandmother's Tears
MARGREVE FOREST
River Argent
Syeretska
Runkelstad
Senyerstad
Sörut
Cronepisht
River Carano
Revskaya
Valtros
MORGAU
Wendestal Forest
Verdant Tower
Blood Vaults
BLACK HILLS
Cantri Abbey
Temple of Aprostala
Bruvik
BRATISLOR
Valach
Vesslau Mines
Griffon Tower
ZOBECK
Stefanstor
Neuraddel
KHORSBURG
MAGDAR KINGDOM
Neusonnenstein
Margado
DORESH
Whispergloom
Fandorin Keep
Langrone
Obersteinau
Shadowcrag
Altbach
Obertal
Silbertal
Hammerfell
Remmauer
Gelburg
Smoltenberg
Bacchio's Vineyard
SMOLTEN HILLS
Burning Plain
ZIGISTAD
WHITE FOREST
WHITE MOUNTAIN MARCHES
Black Fortress
Gunnacks
Grisal
Nordmarch
Citadel
Castle Reln
Wintersheim
Templeforge
St. Mischau
Sargau
IRONCRAGS
Villershall
Peltzenheim
The Scarlet Citadel
Erdovar
Wagenstein
Ransom Siege
Barricks
Bundhausen
Juralt
Kubourg
Liadmura
Volund's Beard
Tijino
Locchistal
Shadow Road
Steinhalle
Cloven Crown
Vursalis
Krongard
BRESCIA
MELANA
Keep of Atranto
Reynolo River
Sinkhole Mine
Schio
TRIOLO
SALBA
Tolmezo
Stenchhold
Crow's Landing
Zlato Mine
White Road
Volestadd
Free City of SALZBACH

ZOBECK, THE CROSSROADS CITY



Symbol: A red and gold quartered shield with a gear on it, counterchanged

Ruler: Free Mayor Constantia Olleck (CG female dwarf bard 7) and the Free City Consuls

Free City Consuls: Guildmaster of the Arcane Collegium Orlando (CN male human wizard 15); Field Marshall of the Free Army Sir Jorun Haclav (LN male human fighter 2/cleric 6 [Perun]); Ondli Firedrake, First Consul and High Priest of Rava Among the Dwarves and Volund (LG male dwarf fighter 4/cleric 9 [Rava and Volund]); Quetelmak, Kobold King of Kings (LE male kobold rogue 7); Radovar Streck, Lector of the Collegium (NE male human wizard 5); Melancha Vendemic (LN female human bard 10); Kekolina of the Derry Mine (NG female kobold rogue 6/cleric 2 [St. Piran]); Myzi I, Mouse King (N male fey fighter 11); Lady Wintesla Marack, Master Merchant of House Marack (LG female human cleric 5 [Lada]); Halsen Hrovitz IV, Master Merchant of House Hrovitz (NG male human bard 8); Selena Harbeck, Guildmistress of the Weaver's Guild (LN female human cleric 4 [Rava])

Important Personages: Lord Commander of the Free Army of Zobeck and Keeper of the Blue House Lady Fenyll Marack (LE female human); Master Necromancer Konrad von Eberfeld (NE male human); Master Illusionist Ariella Scarpetti (N female human); Master Diviner Rudwin Whitstone (N male dwarf); Sir Janush Hermass, Commander of the Order of the Undying Sun (LG male human); Sir Malkus Lineguard, Commander of the Order of Griffon Knights (LG male dwarf); Lucca Angeli, High Priestess of Lada (NG female human); Medlin Gorzax, High Priest of Perun (N male human); Lena Ravovik, High Priestess of Rava Among the Humans (LN female human); Lord Volstaff Greymark, Master of Coin and prominent wool merchant (LE male human); His Excellency Ambassador Glaninin Thelamandrine (NE male shadow fey)

Population: 16,000 (12,000 humans; 850 dwarves; 2,800 kobolds; 200 gearforged; 150 other)

Towns: Neuraddel, population 4,320 (4,300 humans, 20 gearforged); Obersteinau, population 3,200 (1,200 humans, 2,000 kobolds); Vesslau Mines population 2,800 (all kobolds); Altbach, population 2,200 (2,000 humans, 200 dwarves)

Castles: Gelburg, Obertal, Remmauer, Shadowcrag, Stefanstor

Great Gods: Rava (patron), Lada, Perun, Holda, Svarog (Volund)

they see it, each slave is a hostage to be urned to his or her home, if the gods l it, to tell other nations not to war iinst the Ironcrags. The threat of being en and forced into picking through dust of a salt mine or crushing rock a smelter is enough to make many rcenaries think twice before agreeing ight the dwarves. Some mercenary npanies refuse to take such work at all, ich in turn gives dwarven companies re opportunities for work.

n practice, the thralls' work is grueling l some do die, though the dwarf kmasters are nowhere as harsh as the lins, ogres, or giants of the North. arves mark their thralls with a brand attoo on the shoulder, but slaves not beaten or starved like those in Ruby Despotate. Thralls are given quate food and rest.

Each spring, the dwarves release ndreds of slaves (or more, 10 years after reat war) at the top of a pass and send thralls home with a warning never to e up arms against the dwarves again. st former slaves heed this advice, but w carry rage and bitterness all their s, becoming fierce foes of the dwarves, ndering their mule trains and bringing wn airships. These few know what they e, and they want vengeance at any price.

REE CITY F ZOBECK

e Free City's austere feudal history plains the city's current freedom-loving zenry. After suffering under the long, sh reign of the aristocratic Stross nily, the people of Zobeck have little e for nobles or the institution of dalism. They have vowed to never in accept a lord's yoke. Instead, nmerce and the ability of every man l woman to grab life's wealth with sto rule the Zobecker spirit. Free to ke their way in the world, Zobeckers rk to secure a living in whatever nner they see fit—though some upations clash with the city's laws— l answer to no one but themselves.

Still, certain citizens are not as free as ers. The kobolds fought alongside the els to emancipate Zobeck and thus gained a seat on the Free City Council, but the kobolds remain very much second-class citizens. They do not experience the same uplifting spirit of freedom as their dwarf or human neighbors, or even the gearforged. Those formerly flesh-and-blood beings now living in metal bodies hold more privileges than any kobold in the greater city. For all their help in the Great Revolt, the kobolds have been relegated to their own little ghetto and the most menial professions. Life remains harsh for the small folk who once steered their own destiny and mined freely in service to a proud kobold king of these lands. Kobold politics is obsessed with the futile effort to reassert their ancient claims to rule the city.

GOVERNMENT

The Free City Council, consisting of the Free Mayor Constantia Olleck and 11 other consuls, rules Zobeck. The sitting consuls choose the mayor from among their peers to serve a 10-year term, though some have held the position for life (either dying in office, or refusing to yield the position). Consuls serve 5-year terms.

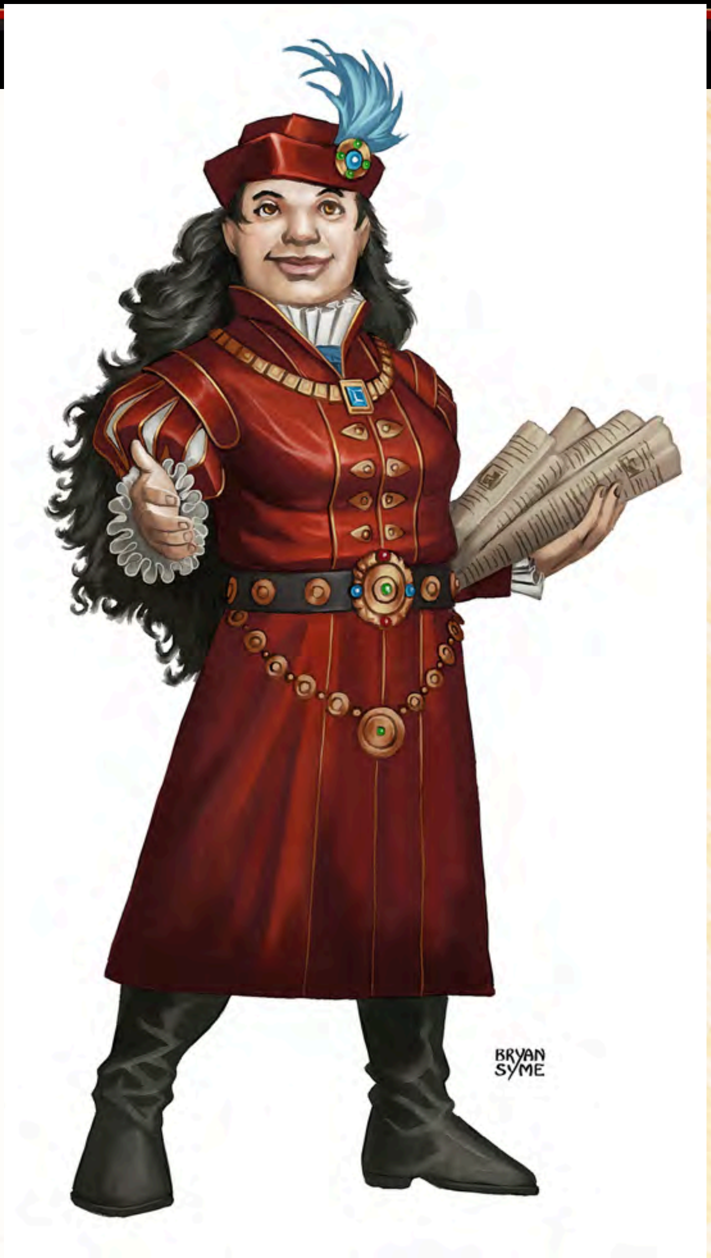
The mayor oversees the administration of justice by appointing Zobeck's judges, establishes and provisions the army, appoints all knight-commanders of the Citadel, and commands the Free City's militant orders—except the paladins of the Order of the Undying Sun. The order predates the city's independence, and this chapter of the organization serves only on the condition that their commander answers to no one "not of noble blood." In practice, the Order of the Undying Sun acts as an independent military force.

Mayor Olleck

The newly chosen Mayor Constantia Olleck represents the growing dwarven influence in the city, though it has limits; she has sworn to serve a single 10-year term. She took over after the old mayor, Karillian Gluck, was asked to step aside by the shadow fey (and did, fearing for his life). Constantia showed great courage in commissioning several efforts to drive the fey out or at least limit their influence to the undercity and a few of the outlying districts. She speaks with the shadow fey ambassador, but the two will never be friends.

Mayor Olleck is a cheerful, smiling, and hardworking dwarf who knows every alley, every tavern, and every honest (and less honest) person of influence in Zobeck. In her prior mercantile life as a mule driver, Olleck had a way of making any donkey follow her, gentle as a lamb, over rocks and declivities and through brambles; this, wags aver, was excellent practice for working with the Zobeck Council and the praetors (see the *Zobeck Gazetteer*).

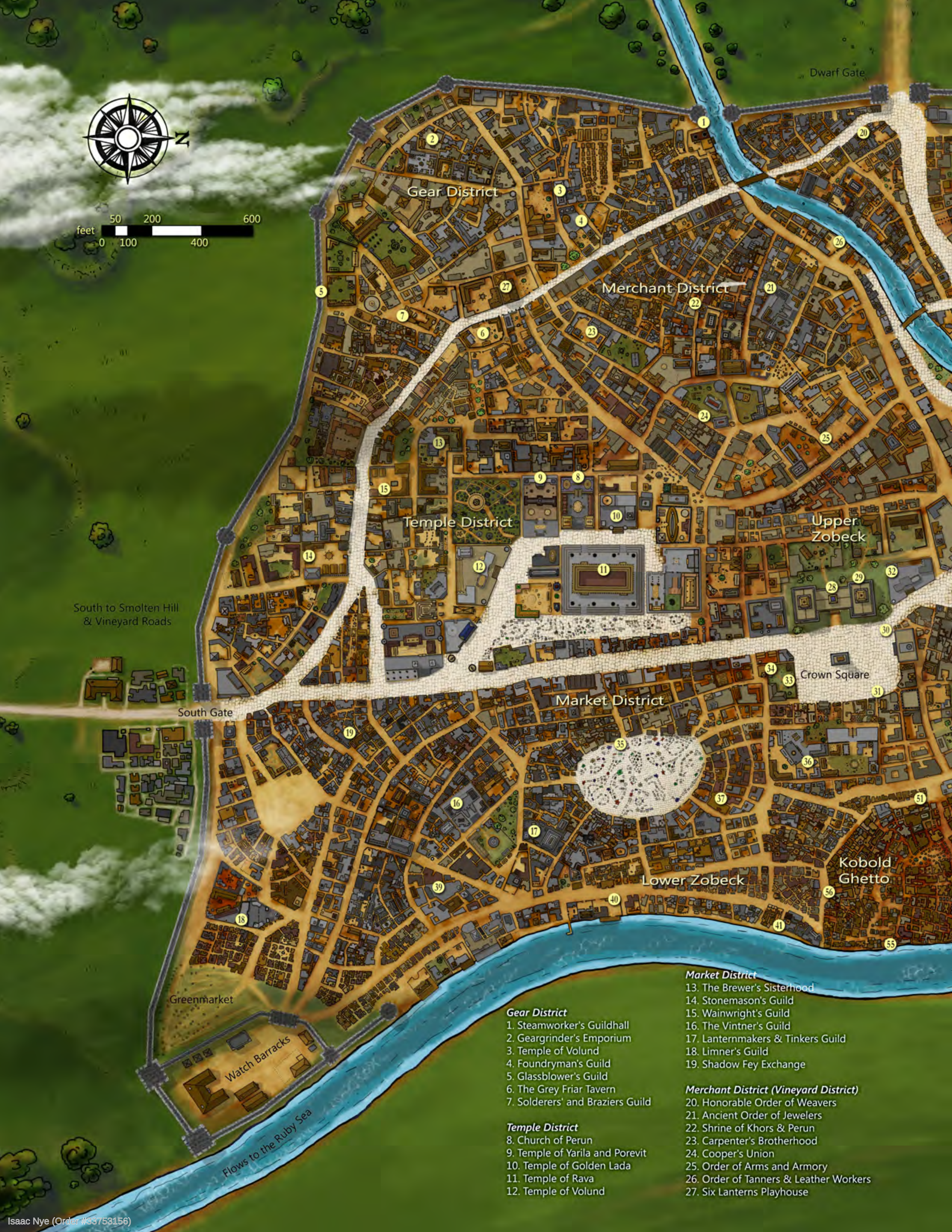
As a younger dwarf, she spent 20 years making a small fortune as a muleskinner, leading mule trains up to the Obertal Freehold and through the Silbertal into the Ironcrags. Bandit attacks were rare as she marched into the Ironcrags loaded with grain and timber and fine brass gearwork, on the way back, bandits attacked for her mule train's silver and metalwork and sometimes bars of gold, which she usually brought safely back to the city forges, shops, and mint. To this day, matters of trade and banditry are uppermost in her mind, though she also has forged a strong alliance with neighbors against the Mharoti after the fall of Illyria.



Consuls of the Free City

The other consuls serve 5-year terms, though many former office holders return to office time after time. Others remain until they receive a "silent office" (a retirement sinecure). Sitting consuls fill vacancies from among the city's most prominent civic leaders, typically guildmasters, merchants, or powerful members of the priesthood—but once in a while, the consuls choose an adventurous individual seeking a quieter life.

Former consul Lord Volstaff Greymark, master merchant, has withdrawn from his seat on the Free City Council and is busily expanding the Greymark trade

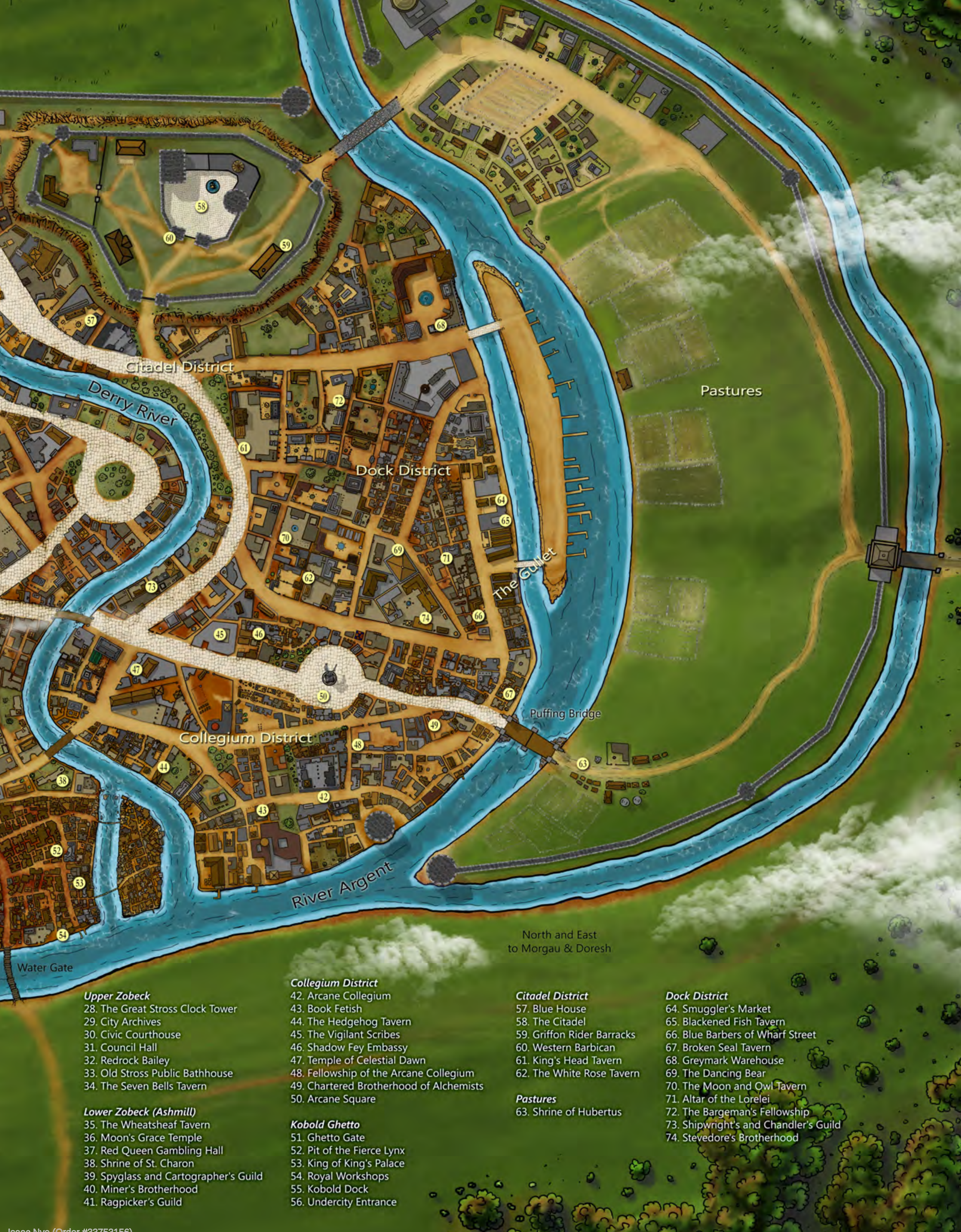

Dwarf Gate
N
50
200
600
feet
0
100
400
Gear District
Merchant District
Temple District
Upper Zobeck
South to Smolten Hill & Vineyard Roads
Crown Square
South Gate
Market District
Kobold Ghetto
Lower Zobeck
Greenmarket
Watch Barracks
Flows to the Ruby Sea

Gear District
1. Steamworker's Guildhall
2. Geargrinder's Emporium
3. Temple of Volund
4. Foundryman's Guild
5. Glassblower's Guild
6. The Grey Friar Tavern
7. Solderers' and Braziers Guild

Temple District
8. Church of Perun
9. Temple of Yarila and Porevit
10. Temple of Golden Lada
11. Temple of Rava
12. Temple of Volund

Market District
13. The Brewer's Sisterhood
14. Stonemason's Guild
15. Wainwright's Guild
16. The Vintner's Guild
17. Lanternmakers & Tinkers Guild
18. Limner's Guild
19. Shadow Fey Exchange

Merchant District (Vineyard District)
20. Honorable Order of Weavers
21. Ancient Order of Jewelers
22. Shrine of Khors & Perun
23. Carpenter's Brotherhood
24. Cooper's Union
25. Order of Arms and Armory
26. Order of Tanners & Leather Workers
27. Six Lanterns Playhouse


Citadel District
Derry River
Dock District
The Gullet
Pastures
Puffing Bridge
Collegium District
River Argent
North and East
to Morgau & Doresh
Water Gate
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Upper Zobeck
28. The Great Stross Clock Tower
29. City Archives
30. Civic Courthouse
31. Council Hall
32. Redrock Bailey
33. Old Stross Public Bathhouse
34. The Seven Bells Tavern

Lower Zobeck (Ashmill)
35. The Wheatsheaf Tavern
36. Moon's Grace Temple
37. Red Queen Gambling Hall
38. Shrine of St. Charon
39. Spyglass and Cartographer's Guild
40. Miner's Brotherhood
41. Ragpicker's Guild

Collegium District
42. Arcane Collegium
43. Book Fetish
44. The Hedgehog Tavern
45. The Vigilant Scribes
46. Shadow Fey Embassy
47. Temple of Celestial Dawn
48. Fellowship of the Arcane Collegium
49. Chartered Brotherhood of Alchemists
50. Arcane Square

Kobold Ghetto
51. Ghetto Gate
52. Pit of the Fierce Lynx
53. King of King's Palace
54. Royal Workshops
55. Kobold Dock
56. Undercity Entrance

Citadel District
57. Blue House
58. The Citadel
59. Griffon Rider Barracks
60. Western Barbican
61. King's Head Tavern
62. The White Rose Tavern

Pastures
63. Shrine of Hubertus

Dock District
64. Smuggler's Market
65. Blackened Fish Tavern
66. Blue Barbers of Wharf Street
67. Broken Seal Tavern
68. Greymark Warehouse
69. The Dancing Bear
70. The Moon and Owl Tavern
71. Altar of the Lorelei
72. The Bargeman's Fellowship
73. Shipwright's and Chandler's Guild
74. Stevedore's Brotherhood

routes into Morgau to supply the hungry maw of Lucan's army. Others in the city mutter he is selling the shroud-eaters the tools to tear down Zobeck's walls. He has also taken a position as Zobeck's Master of Coin, collecting its various river tolls, road tolls, gate fees, and other taxes to expand the city's roads, bridges, army, and fortifications.

By tradition, the Free City Council includes the Guildmaster of the Arcane Collegium and the Kobold King of Kings.

Ondli Firedrake, a dwarven priest of Rava (and Volund), has served as First Consul, or Council House Chairman, for 30 years. His consul peers selected him to guide the meetings, recognizing him as the most patient and fair-minded among them.

Orlando, Guildmaster of the Arcane Collegium and Consul and member of the Free City Council, has withdrawn from many of the Collegium's affairs and is spending many days of summer and fall with Aldona Silberhof (N female sorcerer 6), a whip-smart sorceress who serves as a Captain in the Runkelstad wands. While his enemies gossip about his lack of attention to Zobeck's affairs, his friends seem pleased that Orlando has found an equal in arcane matters.

Lector and Consul Radovar Streck, the city's most famous alchemist, has been promoted to Lector of the Collegium, a title usually reserved for times when the guildmaster is otherwise engaged. Indeed, he has promulgated a number of edicts in Orlando's name when the titular guildmaster is out of the city. He also seems to be investigating the alchemical properties of shadow with a handsome young shadow fey apprentice named Frost and receiving occasional visits from a dust goblin bringing needful items from Maillon and the Goblin Wastes.

Sir Jorun Haclav, Field Marshall of the Free Army, Captain of the Zobeck Hussars, Consul, and Master of the Citadel continues to expand the hussars and has sent a company of 200 human light infantry to stand with the Magdar on the border of the Dragon Empire.

Quetelmak, Kobold King of Kings and Consul to Zobeck, seems like a kobold king who might stick around for more than a season; he has weathered 2 years since his ascension to the position and consulship. This seat's consul fluctuates with the rapid rise and fall of the Kobold King of Kings in the Kobold Ghetto.

Melancha Vendemic is the golden-voiced consul, capable of moving rhetoric in defense of causes of law and security. Her arguments are often carried out through mocking songs in the taverns, as much as discussion with other consuls. She has a great ear for what discomfits or worries Zobeckers.

Kekolina of the Derry Mine is a long-serving kobold; rather an oddity, but she represents the mine gangs that provide silver and wealth to the city. She is honored among the mine gangs as having the ear of St. Piran, the local patron saint of miners. She keeps kobold interests always in view.

Myzi I, called the Mouse King and Lord of the Undercity, is a consul and (most believe) a corrupt rogue. He has a drooping moustache and a twitchy nose, and he seems to always have the news from the docks, the smugglers, and the riverfolk. Few know that he is indeed a wererat, and lord of the rodents of Zobeck.

Lady Wintesla Marack is beloved as a priestess of Lada for her healing of the poor and the sick. She is also a well-connected merchant, selling timber, wool, and tin from Zobeck to the dwarves, the Magdar, and especially in Perunalia. The amazons of the duchy find it more congenial to do business with a woman, so her oxcarts and barges carry much of the Zobeck trade to and from Perunalia.

Halsen Hrovitz is the fourth of his name, and the Hrovitz family founder was once known as the "merchant to the noble House Stross" (an honor they've not mentioned in generations). Hrovitz deals in finished dwarven weapons and armor, as well as raw copper, flax, sheep, picks and mining tools, and (unusually for a human merchant) he also trades heavily with the kobolds of Lillefor for mithral, iron, and precious gems.

Selena Harbeck keeps the weaver's guild disciplined and extremely productive, building weaving spider automatons to create cloth and tapestries at a rate no other town can match. Selena opens the guildhall each day with a prayer to Rava, and she is on excellent terms with Consul Hrovitz and Lady Marack, her principal supplies of raw wool and flax. Guild tapestries are especially popular in Bemmea and the Seven Cities; Consul Harbeck often visits both sites on extended business tours and as an unofficial envoy for Zobeck's interests in the south and west.

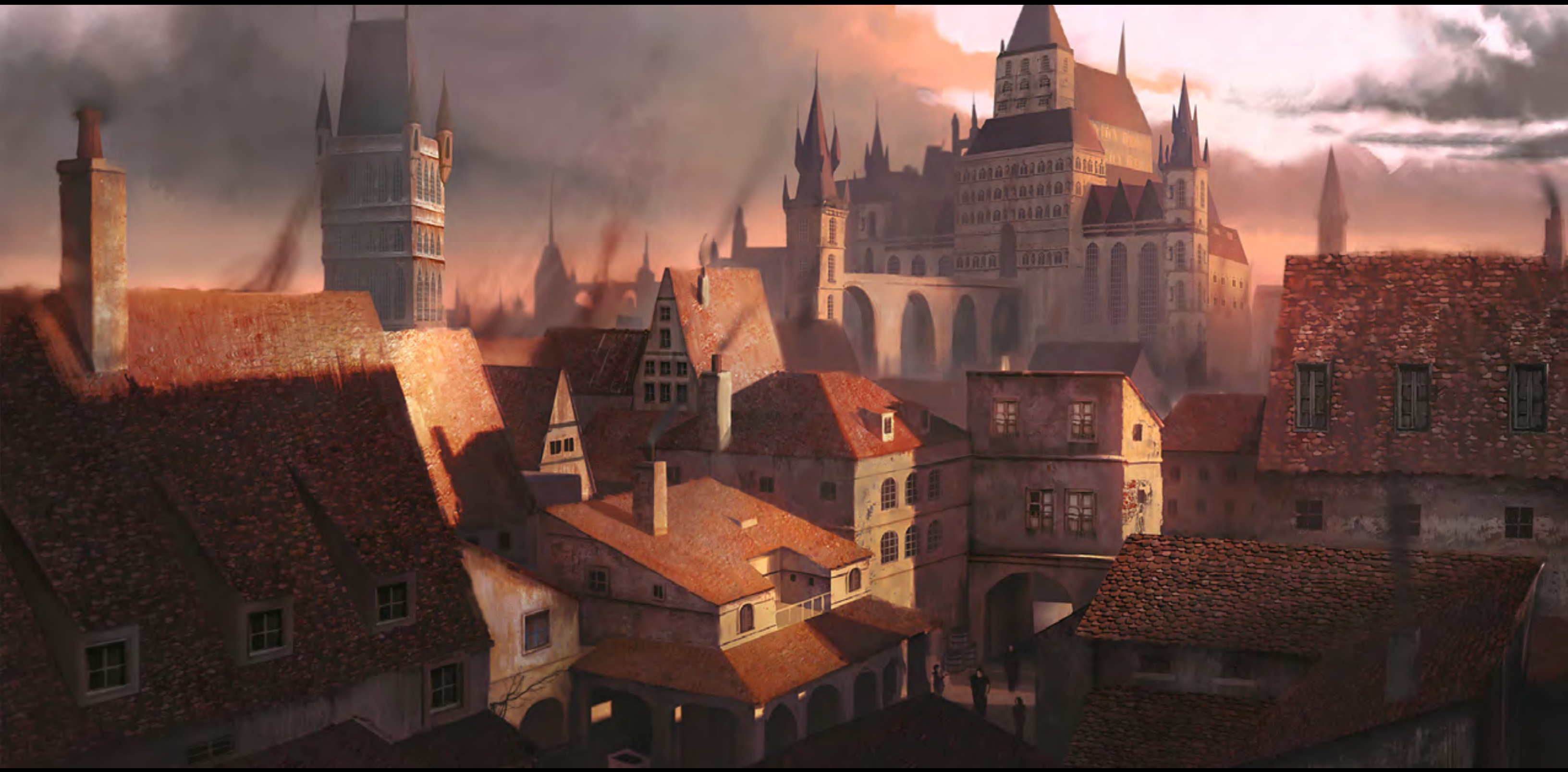
ZOBECK'S DISTRICTS

The city's quarters are all quite distinct, from slums prone to flooding along the river, up to the red-tiled roofs of the Citadel where the wealthiest burghers live.

Citadel District

Rising above the northern section of the city, the Citadel defends the river entrance from upstream threats. It also houses the Order of Griffon Riders. This group of scouts, arcanists, and daredevils fly patrols against centaurs and other bandits throughout the Margreve Forest and serve as the city's eyes and ears in wartime. Their speckled griffons rarely number more than five or six, each lovingly cared for by a staff of grooms and trainers.

As befits his rank as Field Marshall of the Free Army and Captain of the Zobeck Hussars, General Jorun Haclav lives and trains in the Citadel. In time of war, he commands most of the city and can even dictate orders to the Council and (most) guilds. In times of peace, the Citadel prepares for the next assault against the city's freedoms and strives to expand Zobeck's influence into the wilder territories of



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all the major players of the city, masters and journeymen of the Arcane Collegium, griffon knights, guildmasters, and even crab diviners (see the *Zobeck Gazetteer*) when their services are called for. As things currently stand, the mayor, Council, and field marshall all agree that it is a time of urgent preparations. They disagree on whether King Lucan of the Greater Duchy of Morgau or the dragon armies of the Mharoti pose the greater threat. Since both hostile nations have recently seized new territories, the field marshall attempts to make it clear to the trade-loving citizens of Zobeck that distant drums are coming ever closer, and the city is not prepared for any sustained conflict with larger, battle-hardened armies.

Blue House and Lady Fenyll

Outside of wartime, the Citadel answers to the scarred but outrageously glamorous Lady Fenyll Marack. She is feared for her cutting remarks and her powers as Praetor of the Blue House, mistress of the secret police and any malcontents who can be convinced to serve the city's greater good. She often approaches talented troublemakers under arrest and offers them a shorter sentence in exchange for "a little work outside town." Invariably, this involves something dangerous, such as

a cantonal merchant suspected of harboring Mammon cultists, or sneaking aboard a flying city of Sikkim.

Lady Fenyll comes from a long line of successful merchants. She is profoundly wealthy and drives a hard bargain with everyone. A widow and a survivor, she is the paranoid mind that helps keep Zobeck free; Sir Jorun's brilliance in matters of strategy and tactics protects the city when her efforts toward diplomacy, sabotage, and misdirection fail.

Collegium District

As its name suggests, this district's greatest feature is Zobeck's famous Arcane Collegium. Lada's Temple of Celestial Dawn is its other great landmark (see "Places of Interest," below). Scholars, scribes, mages, students, and alchemists frequent this district and gather at the Hedgehog tavern or peruse the shelves at the Book Fetish.

The Arcane Collegium rarely opens its doors to outsiders. The most common means of entrance are the Steam Gate that leads into Arcane Square, across from the Hedgehog tavern, and the Water Gate at the docks, which uses a set of stairs down the embankment to a single pier. The stairs are slippery, and guards and other traps make them impassable to unwelcome guests. Even when the Steam Gate does open, those admitted are most often hired help, agents of the collegium, or someone seeking to offer great treasures in exchange for the Arcane Collegium's wisdom, rather than townsfolk with a casual interest.

The Arcane Collegium includes two small courtyards and a dozen two-story buildings (with a mix of gray and yellow stucco and red-tile rooftops) housing masters, apprentices, alchemists (near the river), and clockwork servants. The grounds are protected by clockwork traps, gargoyles, and even undead under the control of the masters of the collegium. Its masters and students claim a black tower, the large gray hall of the summoners, underground labs, and sturdy alchemical bunkers. All the buildings feature tarnished silver runes inscribed along the eaves, gates, and windows.

The collegium incorporates warded clockwork doors, enchanted gargoyles, a wide-open courtyard and arcade where students can study or at least breathe fresh air, and a series of lecture rooms and wizardly laboratories for practical learning of the arcane.

The collegium has grown to almost 40 apprentices studying under the masters, including 14 kobolds, a trollkin named Herring, 5 golden-bearded dwarves (brothers and sisters from Mischau), and 19 humans. The staff numbers about 40 and includes alchemists, scribes, maids, cooks, a chamberlain, language tutors, arcane tutors, clockworkers, a priest of the Gear Goddess, a few clockwork scullions, and even a falconer from Siwal named Kaashif al-Rashid.

The Arcane Collegium teaches two little-known schools of magic: clockwork spells and illumination magic (also called stars and shadow magic). The college is an acknowledged leader in shadow magic, though the most accomplished arcanists of that school are the shadow fey, who are loath to share what they know.

In addition to Guildmaster Orlando and Lector Radovich Streck, the other prominent members of the collegium include Master Necromancer Konrad von Eberfeld (rarely seen above ground and said to serve as informal ambassador to the Ghoul Imperium), the Master Illusionist Ariella Scarpetti (whose illusions sometimes aid Lady Fenyll and the Blue House in feats of subterfuge); and Master Diviner Rudwin Whitstone (who retains excellent relations with the enchanter-smiths of Templeforge in the Ironcrags as well as with the priesthood of Rava in Zobeck). The positions of Master Summoner and Master of Stars and Shadows were last held by Linnea Thorn and Sariel of Morgau, respectively. Mistress Thorn was recently murdered, and Master Sariel retired to the mountains. The position of Master Summoner has been filled by the perpetually moss-covered Janock Vandereich (NG male human wizard 6), and the position of Mistress of Stars and Shadows has been taken by the rather nocturnal Ottily Riverbend (CN female shadow fey wizard 9), a good friend of Ambassador Glaninin Thelamandrine.

Dock District

Also called the Gullet—and one of the busiest areas of the Free City—the docks along the Argent River are the center of the city's trade, slightly eclipsing the Great Northern Road. Its wharves, alleys, and thoroughfares see traffic from merchants, barge polers, and stevedores at all hours. Its taverns, gambling dens, and bordellos stand beside warehouses, dry docks, and other industries of the water trade. Brawls are common, and the city watch heavily patrols the area to ensure the smooth continuation of commerce. Despite its reputation for drunken violence, the district works hard and moves a huge volume of cargo on and off the river's barges.

Blue Barbers of Wharf Street

This group of a dozen blue-haired gnomes arrived some years ago and was met with immediate suspicion from the praetors and bullying visits from city guards and hussars. They are, strangely enough, not Niemheim gnomes at all but claim to hail from the Court of Midnight Teeth, a shadow fey court of long standing in the Shadow Realm. Their proficiency with razors, moustache wax, and restorative hair tonics has slowly won them a loyal following among the Griffon Knights and hussars and some of the city's dwarves. Others mutter that the Blue Barbers are not merely gossips and barbers good with a quip and a tale but actually serve as smiling spies and assassins for the shadow fey.

Bargewright Maesker

A young, smiling, and hardworking man such as the bargewright Maesker is rare in any town, and Zobeck is lucky to have him building and repairing its barges quickly and cheaply. Many ship captains share information with him in passing; he seems remarkably well informed. He keeps a small team of halflings, humans, and ravenfolk very busy, but he won't abide kobolds; the scars on his arms are souvenirs of many knife fights and brawls he has fought against the scaly folk down at the Fierce Lynx fighting pit.

Gear District

The Gear District lies on the city's western side near the Dwarven Gate. It is primarily a region of tin and brass merchants, gear grinders, and gearforged repair shops. Here one sees the greatest concentration of the city's gearforged, and here the best dwarven clockwork mages and engineers create wondrous creations in iron and brass.

The entire region revolves around the Steamworker's Guildhall and the Geargrinder's Emporium, two structures built at enormous expense with ribs of cast iron. The tin toys and sharp knives sold here are very well made, but the greatest prizes are the new gearforged given life each month through the combined efforts of mages, geargrinders, clockworker kobolds, and dwarven engineers, all at phenomenal expense. Despite the cost, one new clockwork guard emerges each month (some believe the Free City is slowly building an army of loyal gearforged soldiers), and most months, a privately funded gearforged does as well. These independent gearforged must pay off the cost of their creation, and most do so through service to a wealthy family, temple, or guild.

From time to time, dwarven mule trains from the Ironcrags bring in shipments of iron and unusual alloys, jewels for precision gearing, and offerings for the temple of Volund. His shrine here clearly shows the dwarven influence. An ever-burning altar and anvil stand before his statue, and his dwarven acolytes call out his name in Dwarvish as they tap out the rhythm of Volund's hymns and songs of praise. The noise of worship is often lost in the district's other racket.

Kobold Ghetto

The Kobold Ghetto, a warren of streets no more than 6 feet wide (at best), lies adjacent to the Argent and Derry Rivers. Throughout most of the ghetto, roofs meet overhead to keep out the glare of the sun for the nocturnal inhabitants.

The ghetto has only two official entrances, the Ghetto Gate and the Water Gate, each carefully watched from both sides. Multiple kobold "kings" or tribal chieftains rule the district, retaining power only as long as they keep their relatives and minions in line. One king, the King of Kings or Queen of Queens, holds the others in check until their united strength undercuts the monarch.

Five years ago, Queen Clarhida ousted Kuromak, the 7th of that name, to claim the leading position. King Quetelmak ousted Clarhida two years later. Few kings last more than a few years. Some barely last a year.

More than 90 years ago, the kobolds were slaves to House Stross, and the ghetto was their pen. They were chattel used by the family to do the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs so that humans and dwarves could work at finer crafts and live comfortably. Kobold slaves mined silver, built clever clockworks, and worked deadly steam boilers for the constructs and automatons that fueled Zobeck's industry. History largely ignored them, but some believe the kobolds helped invent the everwound spring, the aeolipile generator (a steam engine used in places where water or muscle power won't suit), and the reciprocating balance wheel, thus laying the foundations for Zobeck's fame. These centuries of enslavement form an indelible part of the kobolds' culture, and despite their relatively short lives, no kobold in Zobeck has ever forgotten the indignity.

Now, the ghetto is a place of free kobolds, the legal equal of any man or woman of the Clockwork City. They remain a people apart, however: physically, culturally, and habitually. The single biggest obstacle to full equality is their nocturnal nature. Kobolds labor all night and return home before dawn to spend the day in sleep and rest before venturing back out shortly before sunset. Their unusual entertainments include rat fights, owl races, and pigeon hunts, visiting the Fierce Lynx gladiator pit, and pursuing amateur alchemy, often with hilarious results.

Chain Bridges

Under Quetelmak, the kobolds have built several small bridges using linked iron chains and barrel floats to connect their territory to other districts—and even to span the Argent over to the Margreve side at night when traffic is low. These chain bridges are a clear route for smugglers avoiding the gate taxes that fund city coffers, and they might allow passage to Mharoti spies or cultists of the dark gods. Mayor Olleck hates the chain bridges, but whenever the city watch attempts to seize them, the chains and barrels are cut loose (and later recovered). Mayor Olleck is coming around to the position that these bridges are useful to the kobolds, and she is negotiating with King of Kings Quetelmak for a way to impose a new "Bridge Tax" on smugglers. The king sees real merit in the idea of a kobold-controlled portion of the city treasury.

Pit of the Fierce Lynx

Miles of warrens, homes, workshops, and smugglers' tunnels run under the Kobold Ghetto—but so do less domestic and less savory locales. One of these is the Pit of the Fierce Lynx, a gladiatorial arena where a friendly, scheming fight promoter named Yshka Bishka (LE male kobold rogue 8) runs a bloody business in fighting roosters, hounds, and humans, with occasional knife fights or honor duels by kobold lovers for variety. Fights are held weekly in a round pit that is easy to sluice clean after each evening's butchery.

Winners at the Lynx are treated as kobold royalty for a day or a week, and the whole ghetto finds the fights enthralling. The setup is wildly illegal, and the mayor has made it clear that she wants to shut it down. So far, she's not willing to send in the number of watch guards required to actually end the practice, but a recent proclamation offers 500 gp for anyone who brings Yshka Bishka in for "questioning or burial, for crimes against nature." The mayor would be perfectly happy if he showed up dead.

Other Districts

From the smallest district to the largest and even underneath, Zobeck holds wonders—some undiscovered even by its residents.

Cartways: A series of tunnels lies under the city. Before the Great Revolt, the city's wealthy used these old kobold mining tunnels for their private highways, and noble revelers used them to travel to and from Stross-sponsored Winter Festival parties in the underground cavern called Winter Hall. Although the city has officially closed the Cartways, thieves, smugglers, and undesirable residents use the tunnels to conduct business or lair within them.

Lower Zobeck (Ashmill): Ashmill is home to the Free City's poor and unskilled working classes, though a few merchants such as the Kappa family have purchased large chunks of space near the Moon's Grace Temple and the shrine to St. Charon (Charun). Lower Zobeck also houses the Wheatsheaf Tavern, a favored drinking hole for smugglers and rogues. Merchants selling foodstuff, livestock, and spices do brisk business in this district.

Market District (Vineyard District): Merchants selling carpets, cloth, leather, wine, weapons, alchemical powders, poisons, and goods from distant lands hawk their wares from tiny stalls in this district. This includes elfmarked traders from Dornig, dwarven ironmongers from the Cantons, horse traders from Trombei, Mharoti carpet sellers, and sometimes shadow fey traders with goods from the Shadow Realm, sold in the gloomy halls of the Shadow Fey Exchange. Most anything can be found for sale here, in season and for the right price.

Merchant District: Weavers, cobblers, coopers, carpenters, jewelers, armorers, and other skilled workers maintain shops lining this district. Some of their wares are sold in the Market District, supplementing their income, but these artisans work to order and have enough orders to keep them busy. Many merchants reside in the upper levels of their shops, though the wealthier ones maintain residences in Upper Zobeck.

Temple District: Temples to the Free City's five main deities—Lada (her largest temple in Zobeck is here), Perun, Rava, Volund, and Holda—dominate this district; a few smaller shrines to St. Charon, Ninkash, and St. Pirun are tucked into corners. The structures surrounding the temples house their staff or store goods and livestock to support the clerics.

Upper Zobeck: The Free City's government centers, including the Council Hall, City Archives, the Redrock Bailey (jail), and the Civic Courthouse, cluster in this district. The opulent, painted-brick houses of the city's richest and oldest families stand in the Crown Square portion of the district, where the great Old Stross Clock tolls the hours.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Zobeck is full of strange corners and byways for those who like poking into shadowed streets and noisy shops.

Old Stross Public Bathhouse

The Old Stross Public Bathhouse lies at the heart of Zobeck. Located just south of Crown Square and facing the Founders' Statues at the tip of the Crown Spike, the baths once served only the aristocracy. After the Revolt, access to the spring waters was opened to the general population. This is one of the few places remaining in Zobeck where one can see the lost extravagance of the deposed regime, but the people appreciate it as a reminder and a monument. The Old Stross Public Bathhouse is now a shared social space dedicated to the triumph of the Revolt. Considered both neutral ground and a sanctuary, the baths permit no weapons or armor inside except those carried by the watch on official business.

Given that, it's not unusual to find trade factors soaking alongside gang lords and chatting up guildmasters in a relaxed environment at any hour of the day or night.

The bathhouse has two floors. The street-level houses the entrance while the bulk of the structure lies below ground, sprawling out beneath the wide street. The underground space consists of several chambers containing mineral baths, plunge pools, a massage parlor, several lounging areas, and a gymnasium.

Temple of Celestial Dawn

Sometimes called the Dawn Temple, this edifice to Lada is one of two temples to the goddess in the city. Built from a pink stone that glows in early morning light, this temple is popular because its priests use their healing power on any who ask, not only those who pay. Each morning, the line of petitioners stretches along the street leading to the temple. As soon as dawn breaks, the temple doors open and the sick and injured proceed into the heady aroma of incense and beeswax candles for cures, or at least painkilling medicaments.

The temple's interior lives up to the goddess's name since gold covers all of its statues and most of its pillars. Some fools claim the statues are solid gold, but most of the golden statues are illusions, made of nothing more than simple stone or wood.

The goddess's avatar has appeared here on several occasions in the city's history.

The Wheatsheaf

A favorite smuggler's tavern and a second home to anyone who needs a thug now and again, the Wheatsheaf serves up strong beer and spicy food nightly along with a healthy side of information, especially from the Redcloaks kobold gang or the Cloven Nine's infernal gangsters. The collection of rogues, sharpers, cultists, assassins, fences, and cold-eyed hard cases who drink at the Wheatsheaf is ever-changing but always dangerous, alert, and looking for an opening.

Despite its clientele and infernal connections, the Wheatsheaf remains a remarkably nonviolent place most of the time. The tavern provides a secure place to conduct public and private business or simply have a meal, and that security will end if people need to be alert for a knife in the back or the appearance of the watch. When violence starts at the Wheatsheaf, it's never a simple brawl—it's murder.

The killer needs to have powerful friends or excellent protection, however, since the most powerful gangsters in Zobeck prefer that the Wheatsheaf continues to operate under a flag of truce, and they move forcefully against anyone threatening that peace. Those who cannot respect its neutrality are often said to "leave town by the river."

Winter's Kiss, Shadow Fey Embassy

The shadow fey embassy in Zobeck is the home of His Excellency Glaninin Thelamandrine, Ambassador-In-Extraordinary of the Winter Court, the proud and dangerous envoy of the Court of the Shadow Fey in the City of Gears. For long decades it was hidden; now it stands visible to the public, though few dare pay a visit to it on the street called Alchemist's Folly. Even now, the house's exact locations drifts a few streets this way or that.

The shadow fey ambassador has invited most of the gentlefolk of Zobeck (but notably, no priests of Lada or Khors) to dine and discuss matters of interest, especially as pertains to the looming succession to the west in the Grand Duchy and also with respect to forming a wider alliance against the Dragon Empire to the southeast. So far, Zobeck's councilors and military leaders have not decided on any such alliance, but the shadow fey are known for deep and fathomless patience.

The fey recently gifted a set of black and silver speckled griffons to the city's Griffon Knights. The animals are smaller than the usual breed found in the Ironcrags, but swift on the wing and quick to learn battle commands and their rider's wishes.

Outside the City Walls

Though most of Zobeck's people and citizens are within the city walls, it does rule over certain roads, rivers, villages, and small towns. These communities feel more comfortable answering to mercantile Zobeck than to the martial dwarven cantonal traditions or to follow the Magdar's piety and courtly ways.

Altbach

A small town at the crossroads, just as Zobeck is, but with much less drive and ambition and with more waterwheels driven by streams coming down into the hills. Its people seem content to hammer gold leaf, forge peculiar springs, master button-making, and otherwise specialize in fields too obscure for Zobeckers to pursue. Its large shrine to Rava also contains a peculiar gear-altar for Volund; many Altbachers believe the two gods are part of a divine marriage, a belief considered mildly offensive and heretical both in Zobeck and in Templeforge. Altbach's mayor is Calmuresh Coppersmith (LN male gearforged rogue 4).

Freehold of Obertal

The Griffon Knights of Zobeck have recently opened a new freehold upriver from the city to prevent banditry and secure the lines of communication with the Ironcrag Cantons—perhaps even to reclaim Silbertal one day. This small hill fort is the Freehold of Obertal, currently housing a half-dozen dwarven crossbow archers, a handful of Zobecker outriders on tough steeds used to long travel, and a dozen kobold cooks, servants, and grooms.

The freehold is ruled and run by a wedded pair of griffon knights, Sir Gismondo (CG male elfmarked human fighter 4) and Lady Edeltraud (CN female human fighter 4), both devout followers of all the war gods, swearing by Valeresh and Perun and Mavros as the mood strikes them.

These two are always looking for a fight, and sometimes amuse themselves by demanding tolls from travelers. So far, this abuse of their authority has not landed them in trouble, but as soon as word reaches the Lady Mayor's ear or someone tells Sir Malkus Lineguard, they might find themselves serving in a much more onerous position as scouts helping the Magdar against the dragons. They might not mind this change of venue.

The Cloven Nine

Leader: Izachar, aka "Eyebite" (LE male tiefling fighter 4/warlock 9)

Members: 9 tiefling spellcasters, 53 human Kariv wanderers, urchins, and minions

Regular Hangouts: The Broken Seal, Silk Scabbard, The Wheatsheaf

Activities: Conjuration, curses, divinations, enchantments, prostitution, quiet killings, slavery

Symbol: Nine-pointed star with one bent tine

Alignment: Evil

A notably powerful criminal gang in Zobeck, the Cloven Nine's strength comes from a combination of rumored patronage from the city's Lord Greymark, an alliance with members of two Kariv clans—the Galati diviners and the Heph diabolists—and their own diabolic bargains for magical power.

Vindictive and elitist, the gang consists of tiefling warlocks, wizards, and sorcerers with diabolic preferences, each running a crew. They deal in divinations, fixing issues of honor and revenge, black markets, burglaries, extortion, murder, and more. Their "Smuggler's Market" in the dockside Gullet neighborhood remains a lucrative mainstay of the criminal world.

They hang out at the Wheatsheaf or Silk Scabbard, but their headquarters is the Broken Seal, a Zobeck tavern with arguably the worst reputation in the city. When an assassin murdered their founder Akad the Elder there, the gang regrouped, determined the culprit, and made a bloody public example, impaling the body on the Puffing Bridge for all to see. This crisis made the gang more cognizant of security during operations. Now, they regularly use cutouts, encrypted notes, and blind drops, often working by proxy.

Once a band of street kids cooperating for a better life, the Nine evolved into a deadly serious enterprise bound to hellish powers. Few remain bored children of merchants or rabblerousing posers. This vicious, refined core is razor-sharp. Their mark, a nine-pointed star with one bent tine, panics those who have betrayed their

NEURADDEL

At the heart of the Smolten Hills wine region, Neuraddel produces barrels, wagon wheels—and huge vats of wine. It once sold its wares as far north as Krakova, but Morgau's nobles have taken against it lately. A circle of mountain druids keeps a sacred tarn in the hills above the town. The town's leader is Vasold Crisenso, a Septime vintner who might sample too much of his own wine; his wife Keterlyn Crisenso takes on the responsibility of striking deals with drovers and teamsters to haul the Neuraddel wine to market.

OBERSTEINAU MINE

The Free City has always had mines such as Obersteinau, which predates the revolt. Originally a kobold copper mine, it was taken by House Stross as a private holding and later freed. It is governed by Ruland Luipold (LN male human bard 3), with the maddening advice of a council of kobold mine bosses.

REMMAUER

This small fortress sits on a small stone spire, separated from a hilltop by a chasm; its green roof and red flag can be seen for miles around. It is accessible via a drawbridge or by climbing a steep set of limestone cliffs. To date, sieges of Remmauer have proven useless. The fortress protects a minor road into the Ironcrags, leading to Citadel. The posting is considered a quiet retirement sinecure, and it is currently held by an eccentric gear mage, Volanda Tockson (LN female human wizard 7).

STEFANSTOR

This river fortress sits on a large, stony island in the River Argent, high enough to command the waterway and threaten any ships coming up the river. It is a major customs and border site for traffic between Zobeck and Perunalia. Its commander is River Warden Petschko Valdest (LE human male fighter 8), a thin man with a bottomless appetite for gifts, bribes, and bookkeeping. Remarkably petty and thin-skinned, Petschko remembers every compliment and every bit of gossip about barge captains, and he absolutely plays favorites. His garrison is even said to feed information to river bandits in exchange for a cut of profits. However, he always pays the complete and total sum of river tolls to the Zobeck Master of Coin, Volstaff Greymark, both promptly and without stinting. Thus far, this has allowed him to retain his position.

TRADE BY ROAD AND RIVER

The commerce of a trade city sounds glamorous and exotic: silks and spices, mithral and magic, and relics and lore all change hands between locals, visitors, and sharp-eyed wanderers. Everything seems sweeter when minstrels sing about it—largely because they gloss over the sweat and donkey dung. But as the Crown Square merchants say, "There's no such thing as easy money."

TRADERS AND CARGOS

The traders and stevedores make their coin because someone has to physically move all the iron, wheat, silver, ale, wool, and timber sold in Zobeck. The traders take a (sometimes literal) whip to kobolds or humans who load and unload the city's barges, oxcarts, mule trains, and hay wagons. Once the trip begins, the costs rise: time, toil, fodder, and travel all drain money. All too often, blood is also a price of doing business—someone has to defend the cargo against bold robbers, ravaging ogres or grasping petty lordlings who close their bridges and demand a toll.

Still they come, more merchants and more caravans, and Zobeck welcomes each shipment. The Free City spurns no opportunity to gather every copper. Many merchants prize the most uneventful and short routes to Cronepisht or Hammerfell. Specialist items—rare and spectacular—can command far greater fees and profits. The Templeforge airships from the Ironcrags, the Flying Cities of Sikkim that charge the air with their alluring spice, and even the dark roads of the shadow fey that connect the Free City to the courts of the Shadow Realm can return many times an investment's cost to a bold and careful merchant. There is always money to be made if you can bring the right goods to the right market.

RIVER TRAFFIC

Pulling an oar is easier than marching up a mountain, but the "easy money" of floating on a barge downriver to Sveretska or Perunalia is not so easy that guards trip over one another volunteering for it. The river gods are fickle, especially in spring, and a pack of river trolls can capsize a barge no matter how heavily laden it is. Worse, the songs of the lorelei can distract a pilot, and hill giant bandits can sink a cargo with a few well-placed boulders and loot the wreck. Of course, if the cargo doesn't go through, the guards don't get paid.

A successful run south creates still more work when going back upriver. Guards are expected to pull at the oars. Forests crowd the riverbank for long miles, hiding bandits and worse. And the river is filled with snags, shifting sandbars, and other barges whose cargo might have been stolen. Some barge hands—divided into various types of pole-wielding toughs, stevedores, and rope walkers—give up the hard-but-honest life and turn to banditry, pretending friendship and then turning pirate. And the oily Warden Petschko always demands "a word and kind gift" to pass by the castle at Stefanstor, in addition to the Zobeck river toll. Say what you want about the stink of a mule train, at least you won't drown in your armor.

THE MOUNTAIN ROAD

Up the Silbertal, past the ruins, over the Gunnacks Pass and then make a choice at the Fork: north to Grisal and Hirschberg and northern Dornig and the Wolfmark, or east, down past the cheesemakers of Kubourg and on to Salzbach and Tintager and Bemmea. Either way, the mountain passes close each fall and reopen in the spring as rushing cataracts of snowmelt and frozen wind, but there are great bragging rights for the first mule train to make it in either direction, down from the cantons and into the welcoming arms of the lowlanders.

While the mountain road is steep and cold, dozens of small dwarfholds, shepherd's huts, and other safe places are built into small caverns or along a brook, stout enough to spend the night and keep a string of mules warm and safe. Sometimes, though, a dwarfhold might decide to make a human mule train vanish; stories are told (not in dwarven hearing) of those who disappear under the mountains to mine gold or mithral for bearded masters, those poor souls never to see daylight again.

South on the Sultan's Road

Goods travel to and from the Magdar Kingdom and farther south in oxcarts, meaning they might travel 12 miles on a good day. Though glacially slow, this method has at least two good points to recommend it: oxen are cheap and pull efficiently, and ox carts can be circled for protection each night. The latter's importance cannot be overstated. The White Mountain Marches remain a nest of robbers, and the raiders from the Mharoti Empire are patient and vicious. The third unspoken benefit of this system is its reduced personnel cost and plentiful opportunities for advancement: half the guard company will likely die before reaching Harkesh.

Great Northern Road

Zobeck's Griffon Riders protect travel and trade along the Great Northern Road, which stretches over 200 miles from Zobeck to Castle Valach on its way to the city of Bratislor in the north. Though the road is only a wagon-width wide in most places, the forest seems unable to totally reclaim it; the road remains a scar cut down the Margreve's face. High overhead, the branches of flanking trees reach for each other, turning the road into a long tunnel with a tall, green gothic arch. Some sun breaks through, but night falls early here even in high summer.

Due to boggy, rocky, and overgrown stretches, travelers frequently take a fortnight to traverse the road on foot. Riders typically take 8 to 10 days without wagons. Coaching inns, spaced one to three days apart, offer travelers a respite from beasts and weather.

Though snow and cold challenge winter travelers, the road's condition suffers most from melt waters, rains, and mud in the early spring. Coaching inns are either closed or not prepared for travelers during this time. Merchants willing to risk the Great Northern Road before the annual Road Opening Festival in Zobeck can expect tough going from both the terrain and the hungry creatures emerging from the deeper hollows.

The Great Northern Road is the only passable route to the rich cities of the Red Queen of Courlandia and the undead of the Blood Kingdom. As the second source of wealth for the city of Zobeck—the first being the River Argent—the Great Northern Road sees heavy, steady use.

Strange Customers

Zobeck's status as the hub of the Crossroads stems partly from its river and road but also from its close ties to the fey realms, kobolds, Sikkim, and other peculiar merchants. Two of these lesser-known trading partners are the shadow fey and the kobolds of Lillefor.

Trade with the Shadow Fey

Thirty years ago Antonidas Jabber was a young highwayman, brash enough to get rich and smart enough to never get caught. He loved knives, cheap beer, and cheaper women. These traits endeared young Jabber to the even younger—and vastly richer—Tuck Marick, the youngest son of the Marick merchant house.

Jabber and Tuck were fond of songs and stories, and while on a bender of heroic proportions, they decided that the minstrels' tales of callous fey were all terribly one-sided; nobody who spun straw into gold and turned frogs into princes could be all bad.

At the very least, they thought there was money to be made trading with the Shadow Court. Their success led to the introduction of moonsteel from the Winter Court (see Appendix for moonsteel weapons and daggers) in Zobeck. To this day, their original company—the Chartered Merchants of Scáthesidhe—conveys intricate wares direct from the Winter Court's capital.

Though the first emissaries to the Winter Court returned to the Free City in pieces over a period of six months, the youths persevered. Before the year was out, the first glass caravans returned to Zobeck from the Shadow Realm. The profit was enormous, given the fey's belief that haggling for gold—as opposed to the sublime intangibles of mortal memory and human degradation—was beneath them, and the simple fact that the Winter Court has little use for money.

Gold changed hands, but not nearly as much as Jabber and Tuck feared. The fey happily took gold for the children's toys and apprentices' work the caravans seemed so interested in (such as ghostly silver lutes, goblets of spun ice, or essence of blizzard), but the rarest items sold only for happy memories, years of the human haggler's life, or sex. Given the beauty of the Winter Court, the last was the most freely traded. When asked why such a premium was placed on congress with mortals, the fey invariably replied, "It warms us."

Now in their third decade on the dark roads, Jabber and Tuck are still crude and greedy, but they have grown more cautious. Rumors persist that they and the shadow fey had something to do with the retirement of the old mayor Karrillian Gluck, and that the new shadow fey embassy in the city is more than just a political haven for the fey but also home to plots to cheat, swindle, or at least monopolize trade between the shadow realm and the mortal world. Certainly, the market for moonsteel has dried up for Jabber and Tuck—now all such sales go through the embassy and involve swearing a fey oath never to use such weapons against their makers.

LILLEFOR

The kobold city of Lillefor lies near Morgau and Doresh. It has two simple defenses protecting it from the nearby Ghoul Imperium's ambitions. First, kobold merchants bring valuable meat, paper, and metal goods to the underground empire. Second, the city's tunnels are very small, and its stone is too hard to burrow through easily. Lillefor is a haven for the small races: dark creeper bandits sell their ill-gotten gains, derro sell ore and ingots, and goblins hire themselves out as bat riders or scouts. The kobolds discourage Big Folk (and gnomes) from visiting.

The kobold King Kekarrac rules from a central square inside all those trap-riddled tunnels. Appropriately sized and diplomatic creatures can wrangle a short pass to visit the city for 8, 12, or 24 hours (depending on the size of their bribe). Larger travelers can enter Lillefor but must constantly squeeze through the passages and doorways and can never escape observation or suspicion. The kobolds of Zobeck think the Lillefor kobolds are a bit foolish for living so close to hideous undead of several varieties, but they also seem slightly envious that (whatever the dangers of rampaging vampires or purple worms) they are at least independent. King Kekarrac and the Zobeck King of Kings exchange yearly gifts, each striving to outdo the other in garish excess.

CROSSROADS TRADING HOUSES

Dozens or hundreds of trading houses clog the roads with mule trains and the rivers with barges. Some are more successful than others, and most specialize in certain routes or goods.

Charon's Chosen: Entirely a barge-driven trade company, the secret of Charon's Chosen is its close ties to the priesthood of St. Charon and its ability to travel between rivers on the shadow roads. The company trades in extremely expensive goods for wizards and alchemists, plus a few specialty items such as requiem smuggling and enchanted ringwork from the Northlands. Its leader is His Dark Magnificent Pontifex Umbaros Lexti of Trombei (LE male human cleric 9 [St. Charon]). The black company barges display a distinctive red and blue trim.

Chartered Merchants of Scáthesidhe: The first merchant company to specialize in conveying goods to and from the Shadow Realm, and the only human company with an appointment to serve the Shadow Court of Sarastra, this group of rogues, wizards, and tricksters manages to deliver what they promise, most of the time. They still sell their share of moonsteel among the Septime nations, though they are forbidden by law from trading in Dornig. Their business is complex, and their personal lives hopelessly entangled with shadow fey courtiers, enchanters, and goblin artisans. Jabber and Tuck are widely believed to be one ill-advised comment away from being cut down before Her Majesty in the Shadow Realm, but then again, that's been the arc of their career for decades. They buy and sell almost exclusively to the very wealthy, with a sideline in shadow realm armor and weapons.

Hammerfell Wagon Company: Largest and most ruthless of the cantonal mule train and merchant wagon companies, the Hammerfell wagons deal in iron and copper ingots, mountain ash and yew, excellent chisels and hammers—and weapons for the Septime wars and to defend against Mharoti raiders. Their wares compete with those of Melana and are preferred by dwarven mercenary companies. The company is led by a married couple, Crishy and Vodolf Vikkelsheide, both followers of Volund the Wayfarer and astute observers of the Crossroads markets.

House Greymark: The largest and wealthiest trading company of the Free City of Zobeck, House Greymark has wide and varied interests. It trades primarily in leather, wool, apples, ale, clockwork items, amber, and silver. Rumors of less savory business interests (in Rubeshi slaves, Margreve timber and mandrake, and items from the Shadow Realm) are relatively common; those who ask too many questions find their business rarely prospers.

House Maillon: Alchemical materials, perfumes from Bourgund, and all the inks, parchment, and fine quills of the Bemmean mages: House Maillon brings these and more to Friula, Niemheim, and even as far as Harkesh and Reth-Saal. Goods are moved in caravans through the Goblin Wastes, though a few travel by water on the Bemmean Galley to Triolo. House Maillon is said to include werewolves among the guards for shipments, though whether this is true or a ruse to scare off bandits is not clear.

Mavrite Forge Works: Founded by a coalition of cantonal dwarves and Zobecker merchants, this trading company specializes in the construction and dissemination of the tools of warfare. If you want quality swords, shields, axes, spears, and catapults at reasonable prices, these are the helpful folks you want to see. Trading from the Reaver Coast to the Seven Cities and the Wasted West, even to Nuria Natal and beyond, this group of merchants will sell to anyone and smile as they take your money. Their rivals say the Mavrite Forge merchants retain spies and agent provocateurs to start small wars, so they can sell weapons to both sides. The Mavrite merchants deny it with their trademark smiles, and would you like a small discount on armor to show our goodwill?

Winged Lion Company: The first among a dozen shipping companies based in Triolo, the Winged Lions send some mule and wagon trains to Rumela, the Magdar Kingdom, Melana, and Zobeck, but the bulk of its work ships across the Middle Sea to and from Nuria Natal, the Mharoti Empire, Kyprion, Capleon, and as far as Barsella, Maillon, and Bemmea. Its most common cargoes include wheat, oats, wine, olive oil, and other bulk goods, but the caravans also carry livestock, rare spices, salt fish, and cloth. Its current leader is Commodore Ondreas Borelli (LN male human rogue 7).

Crossroads Mercenary Companies

Mercenary life seems full of plunder and easy money when the recruiters come around. Most of the time, it involves a great deal of boot leather and a life spent in tents and camps. The lucky recruits do get paid, find rich plunder, and retire to a manor house filled with sweet scents, rich tapestries, and obedient servants to erase memories of slaughter, death, and burnt-out villages. Most mercenaries are not that lucky.

Argent Rats: Originally bandits who plagued the northeast of the Magdar Kingdom, the Rats have tried to legitimize themselves under new leadership. At first a group comprised fully of kobolds, they operated along the Argent River and disrupted trade. Now their ranks are filled with ratfolk, dust goblins, and other races; they favor short folk, since their specialty is stealth and getting into places others cannot. To their credit, they even have a number of halfling members, though others mistake them for young humans. The Rats are oddly distrustful of gnomes and will not allow them int more reason than a bad deal in the

Black Brotherhood: Compos soldiers from throughout Midgard diverse ranks are bound in together Mavros, god of war. For this massiv war transcends nationalistic affiliat even business interests. Blazing the trail of war is a warrior's lifelong pilgrimage. Every battlefield is a living holy site emerging from moments both grim and great.

Veteran campaigner Captain Lau human fighter 13) heads the compa be found at a different Crossroads The pavilion sets up near a city expe offering abundant employment op most recent service was against the the captain might arrange meeting captains and prospective employer in the employment of individual un companies have even ended up faci opposing sides of a conflict. Such is

Hogar's Horribles: An accomp Harmund Hogar (NE male tiefling been a natural successor for his Do company and minor estate. His rel half-breed Harmund as worthy of t swiftly after the elder Hogar's passi ancient but active laws to seize the

Ostracized by his blood relatives, his heritage and found kin of his ow half-breeds, forming a mercenary c out of the Crossroads. Willing to ta dangerous jobs with their strange t abilities, this small group of mostly includes elfmarked, hellbred, demonmarked, and even dragonkin. Harmund dubbed his motley band "the Horribles" only once in jest, but the name stuck. They don't make it a point to live up the moniker, at least not often.

Hrothgar's Marauders: This band of competent yet somewhat feral gnoll mercenaries from the Rothenian Plain are led by Hrothgar Torn-Ear, a savage warrior with a penchant for wearing the teeth of his enemies in his trophy necklace. The Marauders are superb rangers and scouts, highly skilled with bows, and excel as lightly armored skirmishers. Hrothgar keeps his troops in line as he searches for those who wiped out his pack on the steppes in between jobs.

Hrothgar doesn't realize that a demon possessed him one night and he massacred everyone in his camp before collapsing into unconsciousness. The demon lays dormant deep inside his head, but it will return if the gnoll ever discovers the truth.

Huginn and Muninn's Company: This company of Northlanders sells its services for gold and steel, always with an oath to Wotan (because all its members are fervent followers of that god). Huginn and Muninn are Wotan's ravens, and two birds fly on the company's banner. This small army has at least three strongholds in the North, and three times that number in outposts, which are both lucky numbers for the Northlanders.

Almut Shield-Breaker leads the company, and his troops reverently refer to him as Wotan's Son. Almut is a berserker who believes that the ravens must be fed on a regular basis, and he resorts to banditry and pillage to honor them if peace lasts for too long.

The Raven's Sons: A small company of about 50 humans, ravenfolk, and centaurs, these soldiers have fought for the Despot of Reth-Saal, the Master of Demon Mountain, the Tsar of Vidim, and once for Lucan, the king of the Greater Duchy of Morgau. They are cynical and cruel, fiercely loyal within their fraternity and mocking of all others. Their commander is Festering Ferdzik, a male darakhul born in Krakova. Company legend says he abandoned the Ghoul Imperium for a life on the surface.

The company contains skilled and dangerous officers, including Bogmila Cahliana (LE female human cleric 9 [Vardesain]), Silver Pyoran the company treasurer (N male ravenfolk rogue 7), and Kostyan Syromakha (CN male human barbarian 4), a Khazzaki who leads the company's charges.

Most other mercenary companies consider the Raven's Sons to be dangerous predators and plunderers who cannot be trusted. Rumors of cannibalism in its ranks are not uncommon.

Skadi's Sons: This small group of rangers specializes in alpine or winter warfare. They are either excellent climber or skiers (often both), and all are assuredly lethal archers. A few barbarians, some fighters, and a handful of assassins, rogues, and casters complete their ranks. The company numbers no more than 200 members, including approximately two dozen women.

These ladies were formerly called Skadi's Daughters but are now collectively referred to as Skadi's Sisters, having proven on many occasions to be wilder than their male counterparts. The most notorious deeds of this company include the assassination of Brandur the Snow Skald in his mountain retreat, and the slaying of a curious creature called the Stag Lindworm near Wolfheim. Their current commander is Wulfnoth Blue-Beard (CG male human ranger 12), but the women have their own leader, Mist (CN female human rogue 5).

The Thunderbolts: A crossbow company led by a charismatic priestess of Perun named Thalia Regenbock, the Thunderbolts excel because they train daily and follow orders (a trait rarer than might be expected among mercenary companies). They number from 40 to 100, depending on the season, with a core of Septime and Dornig sergeants and veterans. The Thunderbolts operate well in storms, fog, or rain, since their best scout, Monfried Aldous-Donner, is an elfmarked arcane archer who can see through foul weather.

Thalia claims to be the dispossessed heir of a minor house of Dornig, though she lacks the manners of a noble and curses like a muleskinner. Her simple goal of raising enough cash to retake her manor house was abandoned once she realized that Perun favored her leadership, and she has a knack for negotiating good pay with Magdar and Zobeckers alike. She hates the Mharoti and has earned grudging respect from some cantonal dwarves.

Trollhaugen Pikes: Originally formed to fight the trolls of Trollhaugen, these warriors now find employment as a private army or as housecarls to a particular noble. As their name implies, Trollhaugen Pikes are well versed in the use of pikes. However, they typically use polearms only when facing larger opponents (like trolls) where reach is important. Where polearms would be unwieldy, opponents quickly find that Trollhaugen Pikes are equally expert with halberds, swords, and other weapons.

Their rigid training and discipline allows Trollhaugen Pikes to ignore taunts and baiting. However, in combat they fight aggressively, preferring attack over defense. They do not use shields, favoring two-handed weapons or multi-weapon fighting. Not surprisingly, their leader is Meshko Stubblehide (N male trollkin barbarian 7), who hates trolls and giants with particular vehemence.

The Clanking Legion

The gearforged have a long history as soldiers and warriors: under the guidance of Ptah, the Nurian dwarves made them for that very purpose. Later, the rebels of the Free City of Zobeck used gearforged to defeat the aristocracy's heavy troops. From the forges of war, gearforged emerge heavily armored and ready to cleave their paths to glory. When it comes time to consider mercenary companies, the Clanking Legion stands at the front of the line.

Officers and Notable Figures

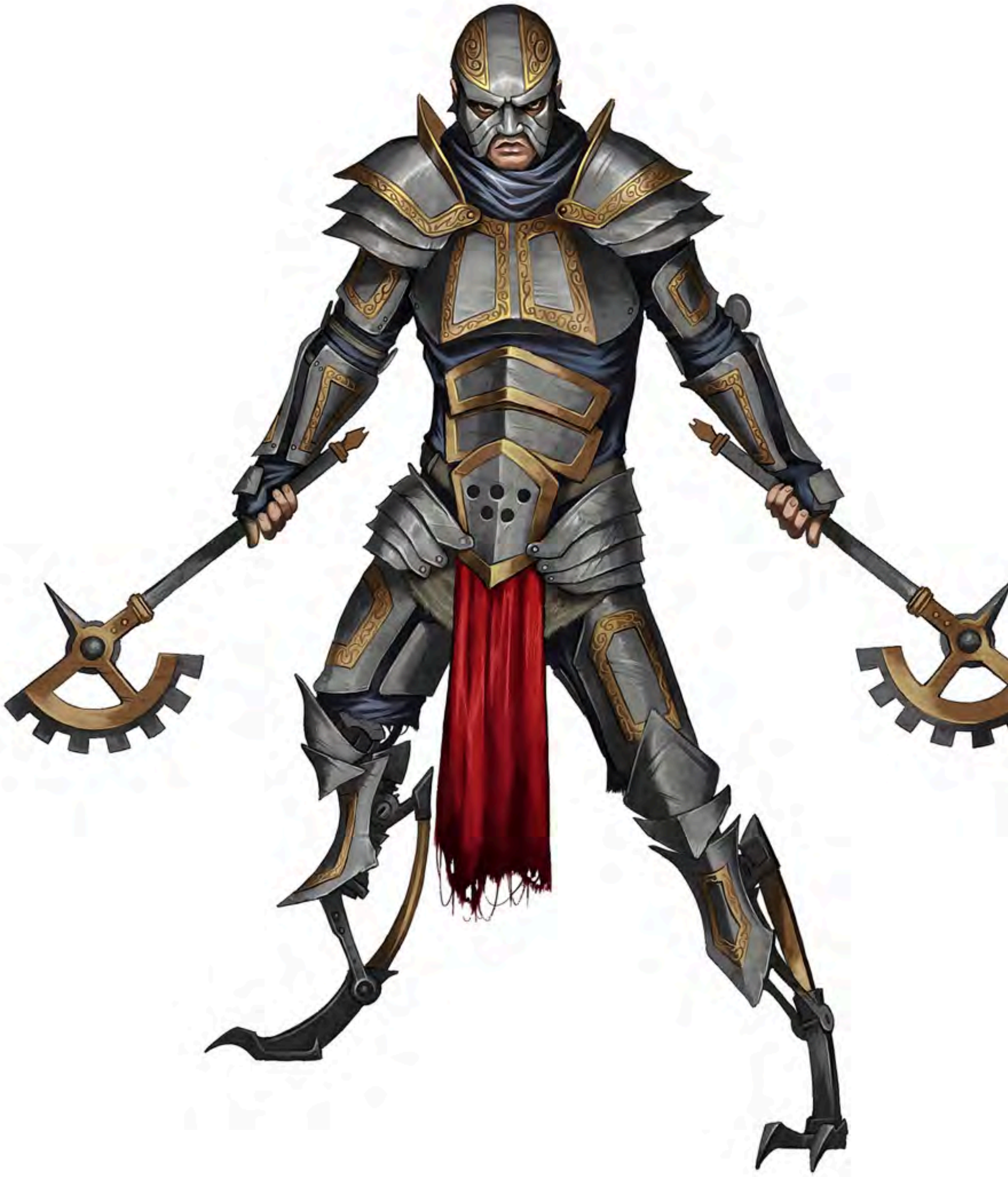
The Clanking Legion is a company of soldiers for hire with more than 250 members on its rolls. It fights under the superior leadership of Sir Arlandros Brassheart (LN male gearforged fighter 9), son of a long-dead noble house of Kitheros, a Marean island. Arlandros leads from the front lines, and his armored surface glitters with a thousand tiny dents, scratches, and repairs. His strategic instincts are uncanny. Even without magical aid, he knows exactly how to structure an ambush, catch a foe unaware, and improvise even the most complex tactics.

Under Arlandros, the clankers, as they call themselves, are anything but predictable. The legion strikes harder and faster than most, and as infantry, they excel at forced marches, shock tactics, and displays of courage. They seem to thrive on the impossible, and their reputation continues to grow. Most recently, they stormed a tower mid-river in the Argental by creating an impromptu rope bridge from the nearest riverbank. How they achieved this magic exactly seems to be a secret, and the clankers aren't telling. A weaving spider or a ballista may have been involved.

The legion's quartermaster and provisioner is Reshazir Rubat Aswat (N male ravenfoll
commonly known as Feathers.
priest of Thoth, Reshazir is the
scrounger who seems to alway
barley cakes, and rare metals, b
non-construct members and to
members' bodies. In fact, desp
the Clanking Legion is human
gearforged. The joke around th
half the legion just to keep the

The legion's most famous se
male dwarf wizard 12), an agin
as the legion's most powerful e
Wepwaset is responsible for pe
and the wizard Ulana Resdota.
This ritual creates most of the l
without him, more than half o
would not exist. While he refus
command, Wepwaset retains a
constructs he has built, and he
and recovers the remains of th
under his care. Wepwaset long
for the day he can leave the wo
of soulforging to another. One
his frequent complaints is that
he could be home in Nuria
making necklaces for Bastet's
beautiful priestesses instead of
marching through another for
marsh or mountain pass. His b
Wepwaset will never retire fro
tried it once and lasted about a
dare tease him about this.

The legion's finest mage is Ulana Resdota (N female human wizard 7). For the most part, her role is to support, enchant, and provide invisibility. She is not a combat wizard and has no desire to be in the thick of the fray. Her magic does, however, make the rest of the legion much



FROM A CLANKE

Rush forward in the vanguard
overwhelming odds, and your
though, and they never stop talking about it.

. . . to set the record straight, the wyverns and the slime-ridden death hag riders had already trashed the library. And sure, we tried a night assault because we thought it might work, and the scout in charge of the dark lantern stumbled into a scroll rack in an unfortunate way. The conflagration was immediate and total and covered our assault nicely.

I suppose the Clanking Legion really should give up on stealth. Regardless, hags died, wyverns died, and we got paid. The complaining started later, something about "priceless volumes" and "our philosophical inheritance." Bah. The legion inherited nothing but souls. We bought our arms and legs and weapons. Now we are machines, and we are also men.

more dangerous and mobile. Camp stories say that she has an excellent command over ley lines and shadow roads and that she might have some personal connection to the Master of Demon Mountain.

Finally, there is Master of Archers Darrenzo di Triolo (LE male gearforged fighter 9/cleric 1 [Hecate]), who is lethal with his longbow and the highest-ranked commander other than Arlandros. His black iron carapace is marked with the holy symbols of Hecate, and his devotion to this goddess led him to enter her priesthood. Some of his companions are leery of his new faith, since he seems a little too eager to sacrifice blood and torch hostile villages in the name of the goddess of magic. At the same time, his skill at ambushes and surprise attacks is part of what makes the legion successful. It's unlikely anyone can match his ability to lure, trick, and destroy enemy forces.

History and Pay

In terms of battles and victories, the Clanking Legion stands out. In terms of a successful enterprise over the long term, the record is mixed. The clankers are often a bit too trusting, and the patrons who hire them, especially in the Seven Cities, sometimes fail to pay them. In a few cases, this has led to them turning against their former masters and taking their pay in loot. In a few other cases, they simply marched to the opposing camp and made an offer. This tactic seems to appeal to their sense of fairness.

Worse, however, the Clanking Legion has several times been blackmailed or betrayed by patrons who seem to want to see the legion destroyed. A hidden enemy, whom the clankers refer to as the Dragon Spirit, may be setting them up as a sacrifice to Baal-Hotep or Mot, the patron god of necromancers. Several times, the legion has accepted commissions that are almost—but never quite—suicidal. Each time they have survived, but the legion's veterans are few and its traditions are thin, despite decades of honing and hundreds of marches.

Adventure Opportunities

The Clanking Legion often needs local guides, additional firepower, or scouts willing to provide information before they storm a castle. Some options for incorporating the clankers into your game include:

- The legion requires a group of non-gearforged, civilian, and unlikely wastrels to infiltrate a bandit's keep and return with information about its defenses and defenders.
- Wepwaset needs new gears of memory, new mithral powders, and other materials from the Ironcrag Cantons and from Zobeck—but the legion is marching elsewhere. Wepwaset requests that the party acquire the necessary parts and catch up along the war zones, where the legion is fighting the Dragon Empire.
- Arlandros offers a gearforged PC and its companions positions as troopers in the legion and the gearforged a commission as an officer. Refusing it might lead to bad blood, but accepting means marching off with the legion to fight horrors in the Wasted West, defending Bourgund and Bemmea, and squaring off against other professional mercenaries in the Seven Cities.
- The legion is looking for particularly smooth-tongued talkers or a group of hard-hitting bandits to help them recover pay from a delinquent account in the city of Capleon. The baron there must learn to honor his debts—but marching the whole legion down there is impossible right now, since they have an urgent assignment elsewhere. Perhaps, Arlandros asks, the party would make a case to the baron in exchange for a cut of the proceeds?
- A devil has cursed Darrenzo di Triolo with a geas that destroys his aim. It can be lifted only by a stranger, and perhaps the PCs might be able to help—or, they might be able to find someone who can.

MARGREVE FOREST

The Margreve Forest is ancient, already old when most of the gods were young. In time immemorial, it cradled the great spirits of nature, and its loam felt the footfalls of the ancient gods of elves and treants. As millennia passed, its roots swallowed rivers, its canopy stole the sun from vast tracts of land, and its groves crested mountains that have since weathered to hills.

In all that time, the Margreve has changed little. History transpires around it, lapping at its edges like the sea at the shore but never truly invading. Though kingdoms rise and fall beyond its borders, the Margreve remains a world apart—a place where memories and old magic linger in the rings of trees and new ideas and ways never take root.

A strange realm that lives by its own rules, the Margreve harbors wonders and horrors in equal measure. Those few regions humans know well have an evil reputation, not worth risking to gain the potential rewards. Every year, however, a few brave souls decide to ignore the old stories and cautionary tales. Most never return.

Long the private property of House Stross, the Margreve Forest retains a certain hushed atmosphere of wild decay and noble privilege. Travelers go quietly through the deepest woods, seeking to avoid throat-slitting bandits, howling barghests, and even kobolds bitterly defending their secret mines.

At the same time, the untamed regions of the Margreve call to Zobeckers' lust for wealth. The forest provides the timber that builds its barges, fuels its smithies, and braces its silver mines. The noise of kobold miners, foresters, and merchants rumbling along the Great Northern Road grows each year. Silence returns only in winter. The road brings goods from the cities of the Red Queen of Courlandia, the undead of the Blood Kingdom, and the Niemheim forest to the banks of the Argent. Maintaining the connection between this route and the river makes Zobeck half its fortune as a trade center. Naturally, castles and towers defend the road.

Griffon Towers

The most famous of the castles are the dozen Griffon Towers. Eight of them stand on the road, and the others guard hunting lodges, mines, or powerful wellsprings of magic. Most people assume that they earned their name from the griffon blazons carved in their walls, but that was merely the mark of the Stross border guards.

House Stross built the towers for its griffon riders, an elite company of couriers and shock cavalry, and each served as stables, roosts, and shelters for the animals and their riders. The parsimonious council of the Free City does not pay to maintain these outposts any longer and keeps its own Griffon Knights closer to home.

Now the Margreve griffons run wild. They appear in both black and speckled varieties, and knowing the difference is important. The black griffons are more aggressive and fond of horseflesh; some claim they are fey steeds. The speckled ones are shy, tamable, and can serve as animal companions to suitable heroes.

Castle Shadowcrag

Once the home of House Stross (and called
Castle Stross at that time), this black stone
ruin lies in the Margreve Forest and is sparse
inhabited by dour dwarves and a few human
holdouts. The village below burned the same
night that Zobeck's rebels hung the men,
women, and children of House Stross from t
battlements. Ever since, the place has had an
reputation; the castle is clearly haunted, and
few hearthstones remain of the village.

The castle sits a day's ride north of the Oros
Bridge. The Free Army maintained a presenc
here for some years, but abandoned it as
unexplained casualties mounted. Most consi
the ruin haunted by fey and dark memories,
though the Vesslau silver mines near the castl
still actively mined by a cadre of kobolds to th

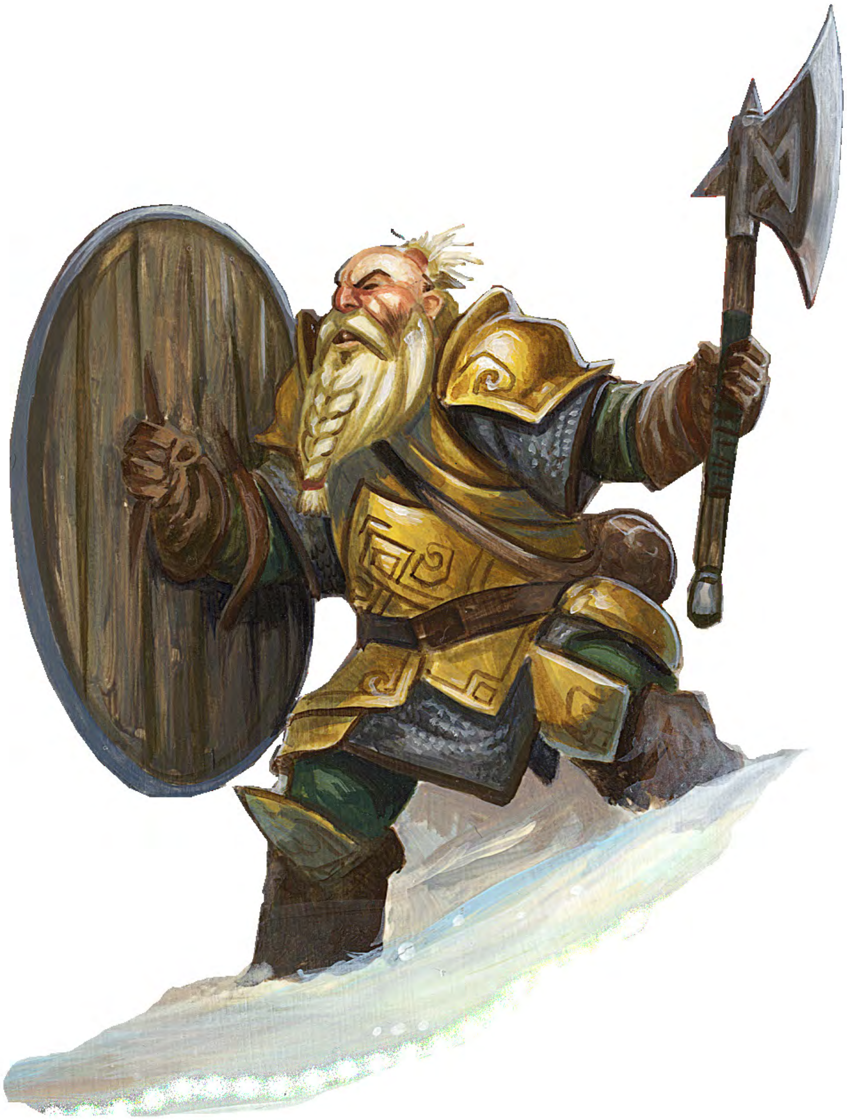
Free Cantons of the Ironcrags

Dwarves think of their canton first, their race
second. The canton is home and hearth, fami
wealth, and safety from an uncaring world. T
do not guarantee greater harmony or joy amo
dwarves than among other races. Indeed, can
dwarves are notoriously dour, fractious, and
about everything. Cantonal dwarves unify on
presence of some external threat, which gives
elders and the leaders of their Free Compani

FREE CANTONS OF THE IRONCRAGS

Symbol: Each canton displays a unique crest

Rulers and Important Personages: Oreschelli van Bund, Clan Voice of Bundhausen (LN female dwarf bard 16); Enzali Hackel, Dwarflord of Grisal, Defender of the North (LG male dwarf paladin 12 [Khors]); Jaro Whitebeard, Commander of the Black Fortress (LN male dwarf fighter 15); Nanneli Gunnacks, Clan Mother of Gunnacks (LG female dwarf cleric 6 [Lada]); Jostli Shmeid, Chief Smith of the Halls of Hammerfell (LG male dwarf rogue 4); Martili Vordrashi, Marshalling Master of Tijino (LN male dwarf fighter 11); Herma Heid, High Vaer of Kubourg (NG female dwarf cleric 15 [Ninkash]); Baldereik Norensen, Dragon Master of Wintersheim (LG male dwarf wizard 12); Toveli Rogest, Master of Templeforge (LG male dwarf cleric 20 [Volund]); Hrothvengr (CE male adult white dragon)



excuse to go on about the importance of the Free Dwarven Cantons to the younger generation.

The Ironcrag Cantons currently number 13, each defined by a settlement that has existed for at least 100 years, contains both free and cloistered dwarves, and encompasses a set of halls—not just mines and simple shelter. Proper halls include a set of forges or smelters, a brewery, a set of clan homes, and at least one temple or shrine. The total population of the cantons is difficult to determine (dwarves are reticent to count their numbers, or at least to share those numbers with anyone outside their own canton). The best guesses say the cantons hold as many as 150,000 dwarves and perhaps 25,000 slaves outside Grisal—most of whom are human.

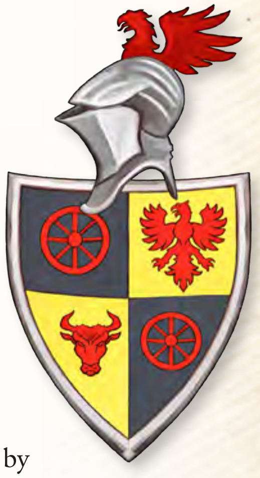
The 13 settled cantons are Bareicks, Bundhausen, Grisal, Gunnacks, Hammerfell, Juralt, Kubourg, Nordmansch, St. Mishau, Templeforge, Tijino, Vursalis, and Wintersheim. Some of the cantons have three names: one in the Common Tongue, one in the Southern speech, one in the Dwarvish speech of the Northlands.

Other cantons besides the 13 constantly rise and fall and are not counted among the official settlements. Most notably, the small settlements of Roglett and Mynnasgard have been inhabited for about 50 and 80 years, respectively. They are not yet established enough to merit mention among the cantons, but they are on their way to that status. The former canton of Citadel (Friundor) lies mostly abandoned, though gold has been found there recently, drawing prospectors, priests, and the curious back to its halls. Also abandoned are the Fallen Halls of Sargau, Villershall, and Volund's Beard.

The dwarven cantons all lie in the Ironcrags, though varying altitudes and passes make some much more accessible than others, and a few are separated from the main cantons by lowlands and rivers inhabited by humans. The two outliers are Wintersheim to the north, and the dark canton of Grisal, which stands across the River Argent near the Morgau and Doresh border.

Each of the Free Cantons is a nation within its own valleys, with its own customs, rulers, and traditions. The major cantons are larger and more settled, their insignia more widely known outside the mountains. The smaller cantons are equally as distinctive but isolated or obscure for reasons of landscape, history, or by the preference of their people.

BUNDHAUSEN

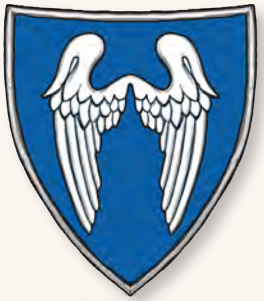


The central canton of Bundhausen is located above Lake Soizal. Centuries ago, it was part of a mountainous elven barony called Liadmura. The dwarves built half their city on the surface, and that section serves as both a powerful hub of trade and as the home of the canton's yearly Dwarfmoot (see page 50). Cantons gather for the annual Dwarfmoot to air grievances, make new laws, administer justice between cantons by common vote, and (at times) declare war or negotiate peace with outsiders from the lowlands (which is everything outside the Ironcrags).

The elven towers and dwarven piles of mine tailings make for a strange landscape in Bundhausen, as does the small set of docks and fishing boats for the lake, but the dwarves seem comfortable with the alpine lake and meadows. The days of the Eagle Emperor of the elves are gone, but his winged emblem and his flowered knot symbol can still be seen around the canton. Likewise, the griffons that the elves brought to the region still hunt its peaks, and they are quick to snatch up unguarded sheep, mules, or ponies.

Bundhausen is the canton most open to embassies and petitions from outside, and many humans (mistakenly) assume it is the capital of the cantons or that it speaks for all halls. It may be the friendliest to strangers, but Bundhausen speaks only for itself.

LIADMURA AND THE ELVES



Under the glacier of Mount Locchis lies the Locchistal, the place of standing stones and ancient groves where the dwarves hold the Dwarfmoot. What they rarely mention is that many of the oldest stones are those of the elves of Liadmura, the Eagle Court of the elves from a time of endless conquests in the name of Valeresh, conquering lord of the elven imperium. To this day, rusted elven arrowheads can be found in the Locchistal, and a certain number of white eagles and golden griffons in the area are believed to be the offspring of old elven bloodlines.

Speaking of the elven presence within dwarven hearing is an invitation to a fight, and sometimes not just with fists. High atop Mount Locchis, a small Eagle Shrine to Valeresh still stands, too high and too cold for the dwarves to take apart. The stones are now marked with offerings to Wotan, but the small shrine's elegant pillars and magical warmth are clearly a holdover from the days of empire.

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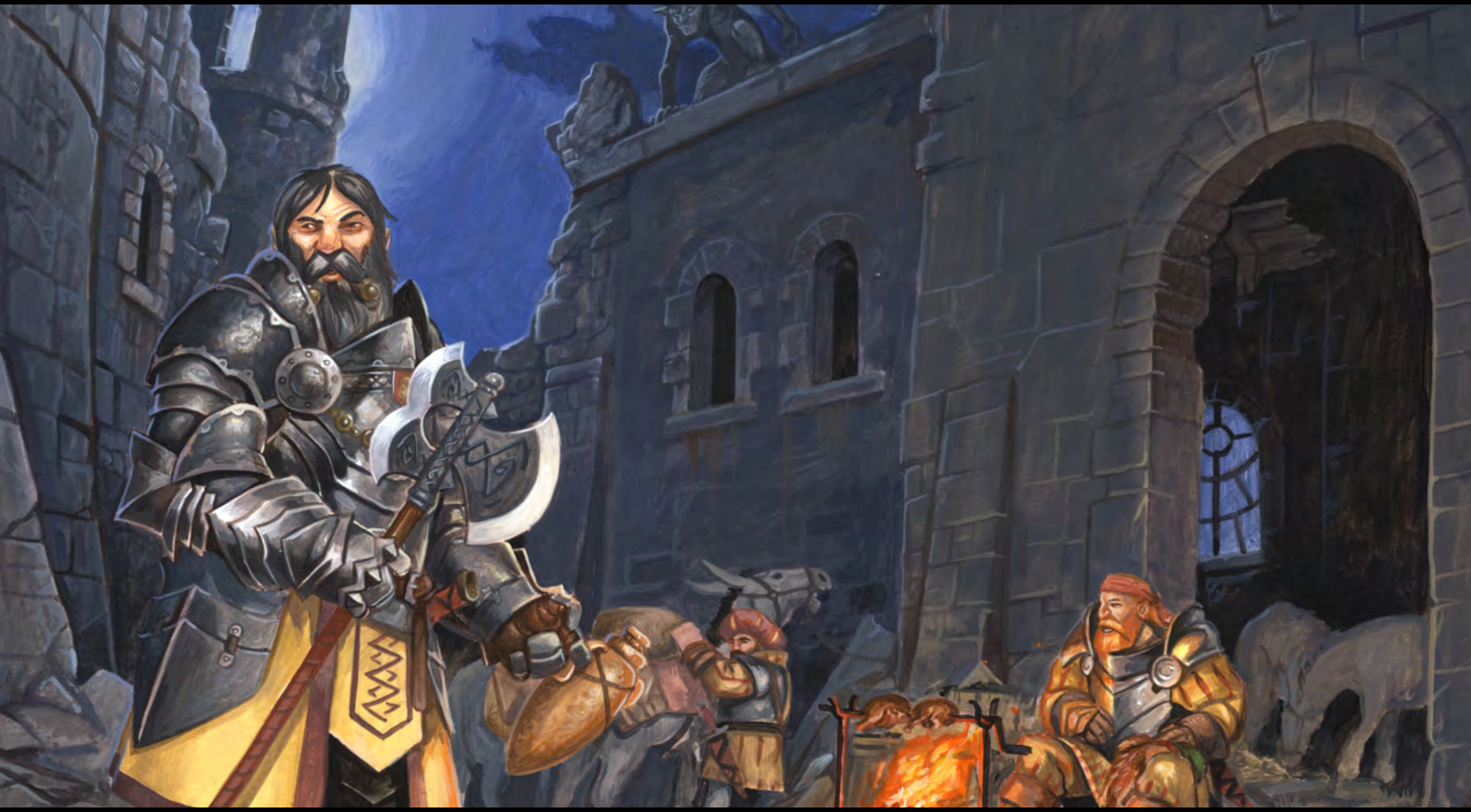

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Duchy of Morgau, Grisal pays fealty to neither; it lies on the eastern bank of the River Argent but is a dwarven land. The folk of Grisal are among the most pious of the cantonal dwarves, with special emphasis in worship placed on Volund and his son, the solar god Khors, as well as Grajava the Shield Maiden (a mask of Sif) and both Wotan and Thor-Perun.

Fully one-tenth of the canton's dwarves are clerics, paladins, or servants of the temples in some fashion. Grisal's priests are kept busy since its halls stand above the Zombie Wood of Zwargau and within sight of a temple of the Red Goddess where the dead are brought to serve the living.

For the most part, the Black Canton strives merely to keep the undead at bay. From time to time, though, its younger warriors mount raids against the province of Doresh in the Blood Kingdom, slaughtering zombies and skeletons by the score during daylight and returning

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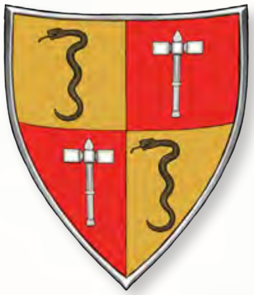
to return are sometimes seen again as black-armored servants of the Red Goddess Marena.

Grisal's large human and goblin population dates from the times before it was a canton, when it was ruled as part of the Grand Duchy of Dornig by elfmarked members of House Hirsch-Dammung. The dwarves took the territory to prevent it from falling into the hands of Prince Lucan of Morgau (now king). In the years and centuries since, the elfmarked nobles of the Grand Duchy and the Imperatrix Regia Moonthorn Kalthania-Reln vann Dornig stated that they do not acknowledge this claim, and this argument has been the source of repeated border skirmishes between Grisal and the Grand Duchy. At the moment, the Grand Duchy wrestles with internal troubles, and this claim is in abeyance.

Black Fortress of Grisal: Built to hold the line against archers of Dornig and Krakovan hussars, the Black Fortress is the training ground of Grisal's paladins of Khors, and here its scouts watch for darakhul riders from Gybick probing the defenses. The fortress is commanded by Jaro Whitebeard, a long-time mercenary turned general late in life, and its troops are kept in fighting trim by occasional raids toward Gybick. Commander Jaro is currently dealing with a large number of Krakovan refugees; he finds it hard to turn them away, but having thousands of them on his roads and building human villages in Grisal is no solution either. The human refugee issue has been raised at several Dwarfmoots without a satisfying solution.

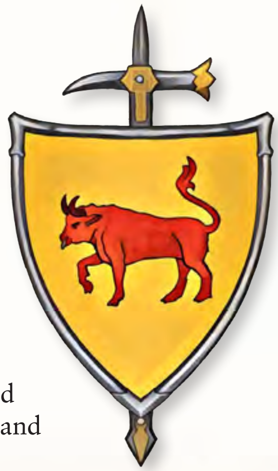
Gunnacks



One of the few cantons to have kept a king until recent times, Gunnacks is the hearth and home of the exceedingly numerous Gunnacksen clan, merchants and caravaneers of note who travel from Wolfheim to Siwal and the Rothenian Plain. They are travelers unlike any others, with young dwarves learning to drive mule teams before they fully grow their beards. The Gunnacks Canton (some still refer to it as a clanhold or kingdom out of habit) is traditional in all other ways, but its people were among the first to travel south from the old halls in the North. As a result, their new halls possess the finest locations in the Ironcrags, with upper halls looking out over three beautiful valleys below, fine rivers and easy passes to both north and east, and plentiful forests and iron, limestone, and mineral deposits. The Gunnacks have it so good, quip the other cantons, they have no reason to leave home. But leave home they do.

The Gunnacks journey from their idyllic home to trade and barter and see the world, and then (when they are wealthy enough) they settle down and have enormous numbers of children. The worth of a Gunnacks Canton dwarf is measured by his or her offspring, so (despite its great wealth) the Gunnacks Canton constantly demands food, clothing, and goods of all sorts to raise ever-more Gunnacksens. Some even speak of splitting the canton in two, though nothing has come of it so far.

Kubourg

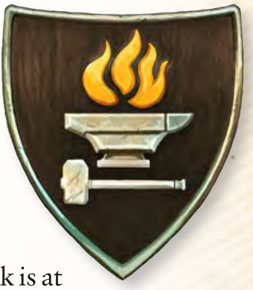


Called Friunsgorla in Dwarvish, Kubourg is a great castle on the surface, built atop a small hill and surrounded by verdant fields. Unlike the Bareicks or Vursalis folk, the Kubourgers are not merely herders for their sheep and cows but also the Ironcrags' butchers, cheesemakers, and leatherworkers. They breed fine donkeys, mules, and dogmoles and are purveyors of jewel-toned inks and black powder.

The Kubourgers settled a rich valley rather than ore-bearing land and have earned their gold through trade for generations. In addition, they have cornered the hops supply, making themselves critical to the brewing of stout dwarven beer. Their priestesses of Ninkash brew the canton's finest holy ales. All these factors make them one of the wealthier cantons.

Outsiders sometimes ask why their neighbors do not overrun the shepherds, merchants, and cheesemakers of Kubourg. The dwarves of Kubourg might not mine much ore, but their arquebuses and heavy crossbows keep greedy neighbors at bay, and their money buys them many friends. The fact that the Dwarfmoot halls of Bundhausen stand across the lake also might discourage the wilder clans from raiding Kubourg too often, for fear of legal retribution at the next Dwarfmoot.

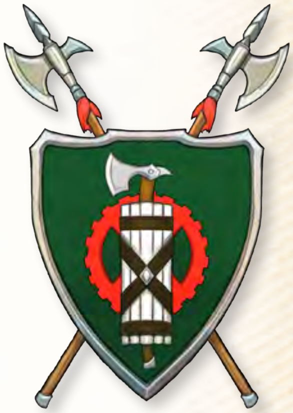
Hammerfell



One of the great iron-working halls, Hammerfell occasionally withdraws into itself, sealing the hall doors for a summer or a year. This is often a sign that the withdrawn canton is fighting a war against creatures from the depths, though sometimes it signals that work is at a critical phase in some new feat of forgecraft, engineering, or item enchantment. Dwarves outside of Hammerfell rarely hear the cause for the canton's silence.

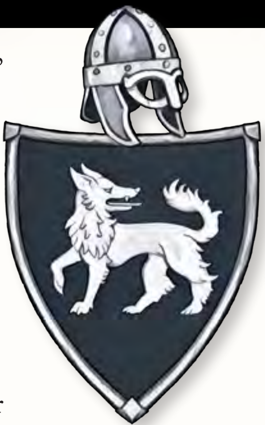
Some might guess that its dwarven name of Mazzot (literally "hammer") refers to its warriors, but traditionally, Hammerfell is a place of great armorers and weaponsmiths, and its smiths create suits of the finest dwarven plate armor. Some of its shields bear magic runes where others display magic blazons, such as heraldic animals that can be summoned to serve their bearers. These magic shields are called Hammershields and their creation is both a long tradition and entirely a secret of the canton.

Tijino



The southernmost free canton is Tijino, not far north of the royalist canton of Melana and the human city of Triolo. It is known for ironwork and weapons sold to humans, gnomes, and anyone else with money to pay, and also as a source of good wood for spears, axe hafts, and crossbows. The great hall of Tijino is a springtime gathering point for Free Companies who sell their services to the feuding cities of the south. "When we cross Tijino Pass" is roughly equivalent to "when we go raiding" in the argot of the Ironcrags.

WINTERSHEIM

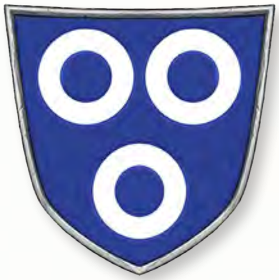


In tune with Northlands traditions, Wintersheim keeps close ties with Stannasgard and the clan-centric lands beyond the Ironcrags, such as Melana in the Seven Cities and the Wolfmark along the Nieder Straits—it is comfortable with the "kingly cantons" that have bloodline rule rather than the freedom of the cantonal communities. The Wintersheim dwarves are famous for their ranger society (the Order of the White Wolf) as well as for the quality of their jewelry and runecarving. Ancient lore of the North is kept alive in their records, and the sagas are faithfully copied for temples and the libraries of the wealthy.

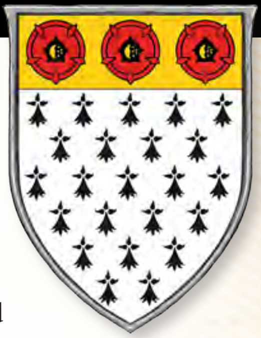
Beyond that, though, Wintersheim is famous for its dragon, Hrothvengr, a white dragon of middle years tamed by the Wintersheim dwarves. He guards the entrance to their hall on an enormous bed of copper coins and odd little pebbles, and he seems to be a bit dimwitted (even for a white dragon) since he is convinced his hoard is worth a great deal. The other cantons have tried magic, various drugs and poisons, and even simple bribery to convince other dragons to take similar positions guarding their halls, but thus far none have succeeded. The Wintersheim dwarves treat Hrothvengr with respect. Visitors who mock the dragon are punished soon enough since Hrothvengr casts *charm person* on those he feels are insufficiently awed by his wealth and status. Some of these charmed thralls stay for years, helpfully shining copper coins to a warm, red glow.

MINOR CANTONS

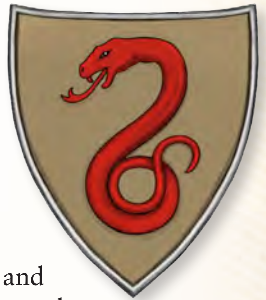
Smaller cantons are often specialized but highly capable in their fields; their smaller numbers sometimes reflect a lack of rich mines rather than any lack of effort.



BAREICKS: The smallest of the cantons, known mostly for the poverty of its mines and the wealth of its sheep and cattle herds, such a strong image of the canton that all dwarven herders are assumed to hail from Bareicks. The canton includes several densely forested lowlands. In addition, the most dangerous mercenaries in the Ironcrags hail from Bareicks. With nothing to lose and no interest in going home unless they're wealthy or dead, the Bareicks berserkers earn their fearsome reputation. The death of a Bareicks berserker is reason enough for his canton companions to break camp and carry him home the next day.

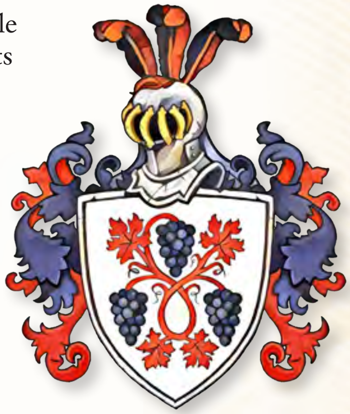


JURALT: The warm lowlands of the Juralt Valley are surrounded by a ring of peaks that border some of the finest pasture land in the Ironcrags. The canton is defended by swarms of half-tamed griffons (fed by the dwarves, but not ridden into battle) and by mountain troops bolstered by the canton's powerful pike walls and its battle wagons. The Juralt dwarves are among the most warlike of the canton dwarves, raiding the lowlands every other year. This has not endeared them to their neighbors or trading partners. Despite their great reputation as mercenaries, they are considered a reckless and greedy bunch, more interested in plunder than in proper mining and smithwork.



NORDMANSCH: The dark black pine forests of Nordmansch are home to two settled halls: Upper Nordmansch, which lies under the peak called the Sentinel, and Lower Nordmansch, located in the heart of the forested hills. The two settlements are friendly rivals, and their trades include silver, iron, and mithral mining, the making of enchanted steel, and the forging of magical rings. Nordmansch dwarves have kept alive more of the dwarven rune magic and lithomancy than any other canton, and the Ordenn Forest is a place of enchantments. It is also one of the best sources for pine, yew, and ash in the Ironcrags, and many of the timbers bracing dwarven mines hail from those black woods. Nordmansch axes are especially prized, both for lumbering work and for war.

Nordmansch is the only canton that does not take and hold slaves among its people, and it takes little wergeld for blood feuds. Other dwarves believe this is due to the Nordmansch dwarves' reverence for the Golden Goddess Lada, whose healing arts they revere as much as the sterner words of Wotan and Volund.



ST. MISHAU: The strange little canton of St. Mishau leaves its neighbors scratching their beards in wonder. All female dwarves within the canton are cloistered—none emerge to make war or serve in the great forges. Most cantonal dwarves consider this restriction at least slightly bizarre, perhaps even a bit sinister. The male dwarves of St. Mishau speak with a strange accent, and they serve in Free Companies only every 5 or 6 years. The rest of the time,

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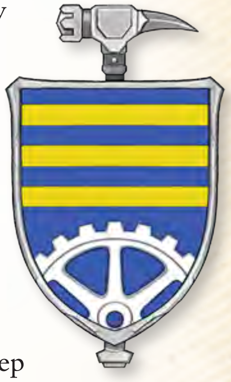
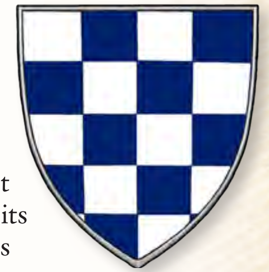
gems, and quicksilver and other alchemical materials from hidden little mines.

Some claim the dwarves of St. Mishau are servants of Mammon, of St. Charon, or of some dark fey goddess, but these are surely tales spread by jealousy and envy. The dwarves of St. Mishau trade with kobold merchants from Zobeck, which others consider dishonorable at best.



Templeforge: Occasionally called by its Septime name of Favgia Baselgia, the holy ground of Templeforge is also the home of the dwarven airships since the maker of the first such ships was a priest of Volund who lived here. Lift gas is mined here and new ships are built every 20 years or so to replace lost ones, but the industry remains a tiny one: very few can afford the sums required to keep an airship flying.

The canton makes its reputation as a place of pilgrimage since Volund's Hammer bathes in the everburning forges of the holiest precincts of Volund, the Great Temple of the Sacred Hammer. The god used this sacred hammer to make the first gearforged and imbue it with life. As a result, pilgrims from Zobeck, the Magdar Kingdom, and the Septime Cities are a common sight, and dwarven smiths of all kinds make a point to visit Templeforge for a blessing at least once a decade or so.



Vursalis: The snowiest of the cantons, boasting the peaks of Mount Mergansar, the Kronhorn, and the Peshvai Glaciers on its crown, Vursalis is also a breadbasket canton. Although it has great deposits of copper and salt, the Vursalis fields of barley, wheat, and potatoes are its true source of wealth, fruitful enough to feed some of its neighbors. The work is not considered especially noble or pleasing to the dwarven ancestors, so most of the planting and harvest is done by slaves captured in war by the Juralt Canton (and bought as thralls) and by the youngest of the Vursalis Canton dwarves.

The canton's elders ensure that young dwarves learn the traditional ways of mining, worship, and the history of the canton. A law prevents them from leaving the fieldwork for the mines, merchant caravans, or mercenary companies until the youngsters pass a test of knowledge and dwarven deportment. Young dwarves resent this law, but it does ensure the fields are well tended and the lessons well learned.

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THE SACRED HAMMER

The temple is a smithy and a place of worship, as well as a school for smiths, armorers, miners, and engineers. Visitors marvel at the remarkable chants of the smith-priests at the anvils during the daily Recitation of Steel and the Hammer Chorus each evening.

More rarely, the smith-priests undertake the creation of magical weapons, armor, and other metalwork as a gift for a particularly famous dwarven warrior, general, or captain (often of Grisal but not always). The forging of a Templeforge weapon, shield, or other item is both a huge undertaking by the priesthood and a tremendous honor for the wearer or bearer of the holy item. Such Templeforge items are usually referred to as a "gift of Volund," and those honored to be granted one are sometimes called "gift-worthy" or "temple-gifted" or similar terms. Losing such an item is, of course, completely

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Lost Halls

Not all cantons thrive. The Golden Citadel of Friundor (Citadel), Krongard, Sargau, Villershall, and Volund's Beard were abandoned for one reason or another. Sargau was destroyed from below by ghouls and derro, though its halls remain celebrated in song and story. Krongard held the western approaches to the Ironcrags, but it was leveled by the mages of Allain in an eldritch siege, a source of continued anger and remembrance among the dwarves. Villershall was destroyed by fellow dwarves, mercenaries working for the Gunnacks clan who destroyed their great rivals in trade with a year-long siege.

Friundor's gold made it wealthy, but the canton fell apart when the gold ran out. When new veins of gold were discovered in the old citadel there, it sparked a gold rush to re-settle the halls and humans and dwarves alike staking claims to immense wealth. This ended in disaster since derro and devils set miners against one another, and the halls are again abandoned.

The upper reaches of the River Argent are the Silbertal, a valley that divides the cantons from Grisal—and that is claimed by Zobeck. The area is fairly wild, home to small goblin raiding bands and even the occasional ogre or winter wolf. Zobeck's merchants have been clamoring for greater safety along the Silbertal roads. Many small abandoned mines and even a long-neglected dwarfhold dot the hills and side valleys.

Liadmura, Nest of the Eagle Emperor

The ruins of Liadmura stand high in the southern Ironcrags, where dramatic white cliffs loom over tiny, heavily forested valleys and pure alpine lakes. The remaining walls, towers, griffon perches, and eagle nests have weathered gracefully in the centuries since the elves moved to Valera and Thorn, though the dwarves who now inhabit the mountains give the area a wide berth. And rightly so: children of the briar, wood woses, banshees, feral griffons, and even occasional rocs said to be descendants of those ridden by the Eagle Emperor himself make their home in Liadmura's soft pink walls and silver-sparkling towers.

The ruins are divided into three primary sections: the Feathered Palace with its associated vineyards and cathedral to Baccholon, the Houses of the Court of Talons, and the Servants' Keep and Market.

Feathered Palace and Vineyards: The palace and its outbuildings were thoroughly sacked and looted by the dwarves but never burnt. Its famous enchanted tapestries are gone, as are the mated unicorns once kept in its gardens. The Temple of Baccholon has lost its stained-glass windows, and the fabled contents of its wine cellars were trundled off to the lowlands of the Seven Cities, supposedly drunk in Triolo by an admiral and his cronies to celebrate the rise of human power.

Plundering has left little but an evocative shell. The Feathered Palace throne was reduced to base metal in a dwarven smelter, and the various fine bits of copper metalwork and the vast flocks of red geese kept to provide fletchings for the empire's finest blood-fletched arrows were likely cooked and eaten by a band of dwarven mercenaries (if later accounts can be believed).

Houses of the Court of Talons: The knights of the Court of Talons retained their spouses, children, mounts, servants, and hangers-on in comfort in a series of 16 houses, each belonging to a different favored noble house. Dwarven records maintain these were the Houses of the Griffon, Golden Hawk, Falcon, Silver Owl, Sable Owl, Bustard, Nightjar, Foxfire Bat, Wine Raven, Emerald Peacock, Pegasus, Pelican, Phoenix, Stork, Swallow, and Black Swan. Each had its own company of archers, fliers, and foot soldiers trained in Valeran battle magic, and many had shapeshifting druids and powerful clerics and wizards in their family lines. Much of their lore and their magical traditions left with them in the Great Retreat; fragments of this knowledge survive in some elfmarked families of Dornig.

Standard houses in this style include at least two tall towers (for nesting or perching), as well as stables for elven steeds, messenger birds, griffons, and the like. Most were fortified manor houses with stout oaken shutters and solid stone walls and narrow windows on lower floors. Some houses employed plant life in the defenses (as well as hidden archer's loops and diverse illusions and enchanted snares). The House of the Foxfire Bat still has warlock's trumpetblossoms (see *Warlock 1: Mythos*) growing in its gardens. The gardens of the House of the Nightjar have overgrown with both pale snow roses and umbral roses (both native to the Shadow Realm and known for both a pollen of transcendent joy as well as a poisonous thorn).

At least two wizards of the Court of Talons controlled portals into the dark roads: one connecting to the Shadow Road, the other connection through a minor tributary of the White Road to the south.

Servants' Keep and Market: The ruins of Liadmura around the servants' keep are burnt out and littered with ashes, even years later. The servants' keep once housed thousands of humans and gnomes, but their quarters were burned either by accident or design not long after the elves left—driving the inhabitants to seek shelter in Villershall, Zigistad, Brescia, and Tijino. Since the servants' keep also housed storehouses and small artisan workshops, there might be goods worth looting still hidden in its dungeon sections and cisterns, but only goblins and spiders seem to find the blackened tunnels congenial.

THE MAGDAR KINGDOM

Today, the rolling hills and grasslands south of Zobeck are the provinces of the Magdar Kingdom: a place rich in traditions of chivalry and warfare, where the Widowed Queen Dorytta holds tourneys every summer and hires a great many mercenaries from the Ironcrags when war threatens. The Magdar fight to defend their borders to the east against the wild tribes of the Rothenian Plain and to the south against the akinji, the skirmish troops, and the dragon-blooded sorcerers of the Mharoti Empire. Thanks to this constant conflict, the Magdar have become expert at the use of the war wagon.

Most armies travel with a baggage train: the dwarves prefer mules, the Rothenian centaurs manage with what they carry on their backs, and the armies of the Blood Kingdom rely on zombies. All carry weapons, food, tents, and other supplies in some form. The Black Army of the Magdar turned this logistical need into a fortification on the open plains where it most often faces its enemies. Their war wagons circle into a tall wall of iron-reinforced wood, a bulwark against attack as good as any wooden palisade.

The war wagons bolster the infantry of the Black Army. Crossbows and even ballistae can be mounted and fired from behind their protective firing slits, and they provide defenses kept strong by sharp-eyed gearforged or rangers. This army's tools and discipline make it doubly effective; it is no peasant army but a professional corps that serves the kingdom year in and out.

The Magdar Kingdom is a monarchy with tight-knit bonds between the throne, the two major knightly orders, and the peers of the realm. All nobles are vassals of the crown and expected to raise troops in its defense, provide for the common welfare, and serve in the army when called. Most of the land is united in its devotion to the faiths of Khors and Lada. Indeed, after many years in decline, the worship of Khors has found new strength with the arrival of shadow fey merchants and envoys in Zobeck and (more recently) Cronepisht. Their dark clothes and shadow magic instilled unease in the human citizens, and the priests of Khors offer bright, clear protection from these fey in the form of sun amulets, protective wards for doors and windows, and even blessings to prevent fey glamours from affecting the sight of merchants and buyers in the markets.

The result is a stable and strong kingdom that has both good alliances with neighbors and that has absorbed smaller states over time while continuing to hold off the worst assaults of the Mharoti Empire. Among its acquisitions, the kingdom gained a valuable province north of the Argent with the marriage of King Stefanos to Dorytta the Fair of the Barony of Runkelsheim 20 years ago. Their surviving daughter, the Duchess Baretta, is the heir to the throne and the leader of the realm's arcane-militant forces, the Wands of Runkelstad, though she is quite young for the post at 17.

QUEEN DORYTTA

Queen Dorytta holds the formal title of Her Illuminated Majesty, but all her subjects call her the Widow Queen. She lost both her husband and her eldest son Zsigismond at the battle of Marroc's Stand when the Magdar wagons rolled south to the support of Illyria and were defeated by a much larger army commanded by the flame dragon Glauvistus and her two supporters, a fire giant general and a wormhearted warlock. The queen's grief was quite public, and the realm stood in some danger since the Mharoti army might easily have swung north to seize Cronepisht or one of the great castles of the Magdar. Instead it swung east to plunder Illyria, but Queen Dorytta is all too aware that her realm might easily have been reduced to ashes instead. In response, she forged closer ties with centaur mercenaries from the Rothenian Plain and hired Perunalian archers and dwarven stonemasons to reinforce the southern borders of the Magdar Kingdom.

CRONEPISHT, CROWN OF THE MAGDAR

The capital city is a jewel, containing not only the royal seat of Queen Dorytta but also the Commandery of the Undying Sun, whose White Riders come and go at all hours to other outposts of the order, bearing news and precious documents that keep the faith of Khors strong. The River Cirkno flows through the city and eventually connects to the Argent and the Ruby Sea. At the same time, the King's Road connects to Zobeck in the north and the Mharoti lands to the south (where it is called the Sultan's Road). In all, the kingdom is a fine trading partner, surrounded by rich grasslands and rolling hills.

THE OLD BARONY OF RUNKELSHEIM

Before the unification of the crowns in the person of Queen Dorytta, the Barony of Runkelsheim was a somewhat independent vassal state of the Magdar Kingdom, ruling Runkelstad and the lands north of the River Argent. It was known for its magical prowess, and its constant feuding with centaur tribes gave it a respectable light cavalry tradition through sheer necessity. The people of Runkelsheim still consider themselves a bit apart from other regions of the kingdom; the title of Duke or Duchess of Runkelsheim is granted to the heir to the Magdar throne.

The royal palace (called the Urbittal, or Queen's Seat) is small and heavily fortified with a moat and five great towers around a garden courtyard. Much of the court's business is done elsewhere, in the Hall of the Bulls (once a cattle market) and in summer on the Field of Khors, where the summer tournaments such as the Queensmeet are also held. Invitations to joust and to attend as spectators are both highly sought after, and the wounded are tended to by priestesses from Lada's Temple of the Rosy Dawn.

Revskaya, Forge of the Magdar

The small city of Revskaya sits directly across the river from Cronepisht and is completely different in character. With its high population of dwarves and the Revskaya Foundry serving as one of the primary temples of Svarog in the kingdom, it is a hub of armor, weapon, wheel, and wagon manufacturing. Its barrels, wheels, and casks carry Magdar wine in all directions, and its finest work is enchanted by the wizards of Runkelstad into the blazing swords of Khors. Despite its small size, the city has well-kept walls and an excellent garrison.

Khorsburg, City of Light

A major settlement on the King's Road between Cronepisht and Zobeck, Khorsburg is a site of pilgrimages at the solstice and equinoxes, when the priests of Khors dispense blessings and hold services for the nation. The great cathedral of Khors, with its triple towers of gilded white marble, are visible for miles, and the priesthood's school of theology throngs with novices and initiates. The city also hosts many fine woodcarvers and stonecarvers who specialize in devotional art.

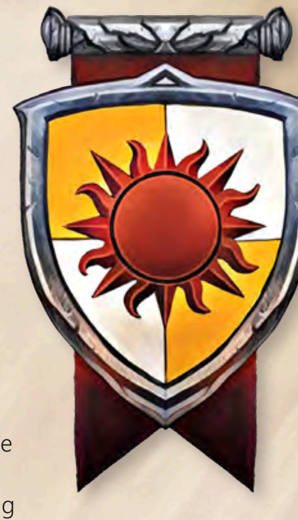
Margado, City of Ink

Close to the White Forest and its walnut trees and iron deposits, Margado is mostly a timber town, but it prefers to call attention to its small monastery of Thoth-Hermes, which makes a particularly excellent ink, sold widely in the Seven Cities and north to Morgau.

Peltzenheim, City of Furs

With large flocks of sheep, goats, and geese, Peltzenheim produces fine leather and quills.

THE MAGDAR KINGDOM



Symbol: Quartered white and orange, with a red sun of Khors at the center

Ruler: Her Illuminated Majesty Queen Dorytta the Fair, 5th Horse Queen and 2nd of that Name, Commander of the Black Army, Beloved of Khors, Lady of Cronepisht, Marchioness of the Margreve, Lady of the Argent (LN female human wizard 2)

Important Personages: Duchess Baretta of Runkelstad and Heir to the Realm (NG female human); Baroness Margit of Sveretska (N female human); Lord Clarikon the Golden, Protector and Grand Marshall of the Order of the Undying Sun (LG male human); High Priest Salomonn Csabos (LG male human); His Luminence Samuka Szgeny (NG male human); Piroska the Wise (NG female dwarf); Gellert the Gruesome of the Scarlet Citadel (NE male human); Grand Marshall of the Order of the Storm Larina Perunal (CG female human)

Population: 2,703,000 (2,200,000 humans, 250,000 dwarves, 210,000 kobolds, 40,000 centaurs, 3,000 gnomes)

Capital: Cronepisht, population 37,000 (25,000 humans, 6,000 dwarves, 4,000 kobolds, 2,000 centaurs)

Cities: Sveretska, population 58,000 (52,000 humans, 3,000 centaurs, 2,000 dwarves, 1,000 kobolds); Runkelstad, population 29,000 (28,000 humans, 500 ravenfolk, 500 shadow fey); Khorsburg, population 14,000, Zsigistad, population 9,500; Revskaya, population 8,000

Towns: Margado, population 6,000; Senyerstad, population 4,000; Sörut, population 2,500; Peltzenheim, population 2,000

Castles: Neusonnenstein, Scarlet Citadel, Smoltenberg, Valtros, Wagenstein

Great Gods: Khors, Lada, Perun, Svarog (Volund), Holda

Trade Goods: Wine, brandy, peppers, wheels and barrels, hazelnuts and walnuts, barges, oak and alder wood, fine ceramic, wool, salt pork, copper, peat

Runkelstad, City of Wands

Home to the College of Wands, Runkelstad has always been a place of the arcane, and its armies commonly include not only cavalry and infantry regiments but also the best battle-wizards outside of Bemmea and Friula. The city stands at the confluence of the River Cirkno into the Argent, and it controls the difficult northeastern trade routes over the plains in the shadow of the Cloudwall Mountains to Courlandia, Niemheim, and Vidim.

Runkelstad is also the home to the Queen's summer residence—called the Rose Palace—and a likely seat of government if Cronepisht should fall to the dragonkin. The city is peculiar in the Crossroads region for its open worship of the old elven goddess Sarastra and the Southlands god Thoth-Hermes (see Chapter 12), both deities with arcane power. It has recently also become home to a ravenfolk rookery and a large settlement of the shadow fey, who point out that the city is congenially rich in ley lines and shadow portals.

Senyerstad, Free City of Oats

A rare town devoted to Ceres and farming, Senyerstad is famous for its small circle of druids and its large acreage of oats, rye, and wheat. Its town is odd in having no nobles at all; it is a free city ruled by a town council and the high priestess of Ceres, Harvester Marrock Brauvern.

Sörut, City of Beer

Famous for brewers, barrelmakers, and hops, this small town manages a great deal of wagon trade and is quite proud of its red oxen.

Sveretska, City of Smiths

The largest city of the Magdar Kingdom is also home to its greatest markets and smithies, unifying goods brought along the River Argent from Zobeck and Orkasa with the workmanship of the Magdar. War wagons are built here, a drydock builds nearly all the barges that float on the Argent and its tributaries, and even the cantonal dwarves are happy to buy wheels or axles here since they are considered "almost as good as dwarven make, and half the price." The Sveretska coopers and barrel makers also serve the Crossroads region, and the city's Ringing Temple of Volund has a roof clad in copper, pillars bound with gold, and bells that chime at dawn, noon, and dusk.

Zsigistad, City of Wine

A small but important city abutting the Smolten Hills, Zsigistad's hills are home to the Magdar vineyards of the kingdom. They are also a point of contention with the Free City of Zobeck, which has repeatedly asserted claims to the hills and the Ironcrag lowlands. The city is devoted to viticulture and some basic animal husbandry. Few castles or fortifications dot the land since the Ironcrag dwarves resent such constructions and have leveled at least two bergfrieds (tall watchtowers) in living memory.

A small shrine to St. Bacca, a demigod of wine, stands at the edge of the city's vineyards. Entirely made of wood and thatched with trellis vines and straw, the whole shrine is picked up and moved to shelter within the city walls after the harvest each year. The figure of St. Bacca seems to be a remnant of Bacchalon, the old elven god of wine.

Castles of the Magdar

With the loss of land and an important ally, Queen Dorytta has begun an aggressive campaign of castle building and improvements.

Castle Valtros

The castle Valtros is the single most important commandery of the Order of the Storm, and it has grown far more important after the fall of Illyria—bringing the Dragon Empire's border to within a few day's march of the Magdar capital. Valtros is a not-inconsiderable obstacle since it controls the King's Road from the Parszan plains over the Ertraya hills to the Magdar plain. With a garrison of thousands, two major keeps, a deep moat, and an army to back it up, Valtros has thus far withstood three attempted sieges by the dragonkin. Its commandery is frequently insulted by members of the Order of the Undying Sun, which covets the castle and frequently claims that Grand Marshall Larina Perunal's Order of the Storm doesn't deserve it. Their jealousy does not suit the paladins of Khors, but they cannot help themselves.

The fortress and surrounding outposts hold 3,000 soldiers as a garrison, including 30 war wagons, 200 heavy horse, 300 light horse of the White Riders, 1,000 heavy infantry, 500 archers, and the Queen's Own Wands. Valtros is commanded in person by the Grand Marshall of the Order of the Storm, Larina Perunal.

Neusonnenstein

This new commandery of Khors halfway to Khorsburg might once have seemed excessively cautious, but the work begun under King Stefanos has gained renewed urgency with the recent loss of territory in the south. The commandery contains a full cohort of 12 Magdar war wagons, a company of 200 heavy foot and six companies of light infantry totaling 1,000 soldiers, a full complement of 50 heavy horse (half of them paladins of Khors), a cohort of 20 Runkelstad wands (primarily war wizards supported by a pair of eldritch knights), and all their attendant clerics, servants, grooms, and drovers. As a group, this "Southern anchor" is the hope of the Magdar's defenses in the south since new levies are growing harder to raise, and Zobecker and Perunalian troops are more promised than actual.

The work of making this battle-ready core of the Magdar army grow and stay sharp falls on the young shoulders of Lady Sunnhild Edelherz (LG female human paladin 6), an extremely devout, capable, and fierce warrior who grew up in a constant state of marches, camps, and levying troops since her father was a cavalry captain until he lost his eyesight some years ago. She has been responsible for seeing the castle walls expanded, its people housed, trained, and armored, and for making frequent patrols to the south to watch for Mharoti movement that might portend a major invasion some spring or summer day.

The commandery also contains one of the Magdar's secret weapons, a young adult copper dragon named

Zondera, a child of Zrandres, the captured drake long held in Illyria (and recently freed). Young Zondera is being raised by the Order of the Undying Sun to defend humans, and she truly believes her keepers, that the dragons of the Mharoti Empire are corrupt, greedy heretics who merely seek plunder and chaos.

The arrival of a single Illyrian griffon knight, the elderly drunkard Farald the Fat, has made it possible to train Zondera in patrolling and aerial skills, but Farald and Lady Sunnhild could not be further apart in temperament. The elderly griffon knight is full of bitter gloom and cynicism, and he (barely) follows orders. He occasionally treats Sunnhild with a patronizing "little missy" air that has almost gotten him whipped for insubordination. Fortunately for the old man, Sunnhild needs his winged mount badly, and she writes off his outrageous behavior as "drunken nonsense" to avoid having to humiliate the old flyer in public.

So far, Zondera and Farald's Goldwing have worked together as scouts and occasional ambushers of Mharoti patrols that stray into the White Forest or Gennecka Forest. The empire seems unaware of their actions or existence, though this secrecy cannot last.

SCARLET CITADEL

While Gellert the Gruesome technically owes fealty to the crown as the Lord of Erdovar and Keeper of the White Forest, no one believes this is more than a gesture of political expedience. To the contrary, Gellert is known to keep goblins, gargoyles, and much worse at his stronghold, and he frequently robs or extorts tolls from travelers between Schio and Peltzenheim, annoying both the merchants of Melana and Triolo. Much of the White Forest's owlbear population is said to have come from Gellert's meddling, and he is known to shapeshift, turn invisible, and polymorph visitors into beetles.

SMOLTENBERG

An old dwarven construction lost to Magdar force of arms at around the same time that Sargau fell into silence, Smoltenberg is a hilltop fortress with excellent walls and a commanding view of the Low Road along the western edge of the Ironcrag Mountains. It also serves as a check to Zobeck's desire to expand to the south. The commander is Karlus Gopok (LN male human fighter 9), an elderly, foul-mouthed, stubborn genius at defensive warfare. He curses both the dwarves and the Zobeckers with equal gusto, but he is not prone to pursue raiders far for fear of traps and ambushes. His young lieutenant, Captain Lordissa Felweber (LG female human fighter 5) carries out the raids and patrols that Old Karlus plans.

WAGENSTEIN

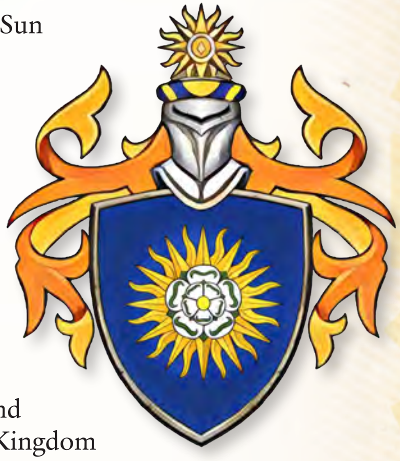
The lookout from the Magdar Kingdom against the cantons and the Seven Cities sits along the Lowland Road and guards the western frontier against dwarven raids and Triolan aggressions. It is the headquarters of the Order of the Undying Sun and a well-run operation, though much quieter than Valtros.

In part, Wagenstein is also a counterweight to the troublemaking of the wizard of the Scarlet Citadel; even if he were to declare independence or swear fealty to Triolo or Melana, Wagenstein would help hold the kingdom's western border.

ARMIES OF THE MAGDAR

The kingdom's wealth is spent on its armies and its temples to Khors and Lada. In some cases, the two are one and the same, as when castles become temples and temples become small fortresses.

ORDER OF THE UNDYING SUN

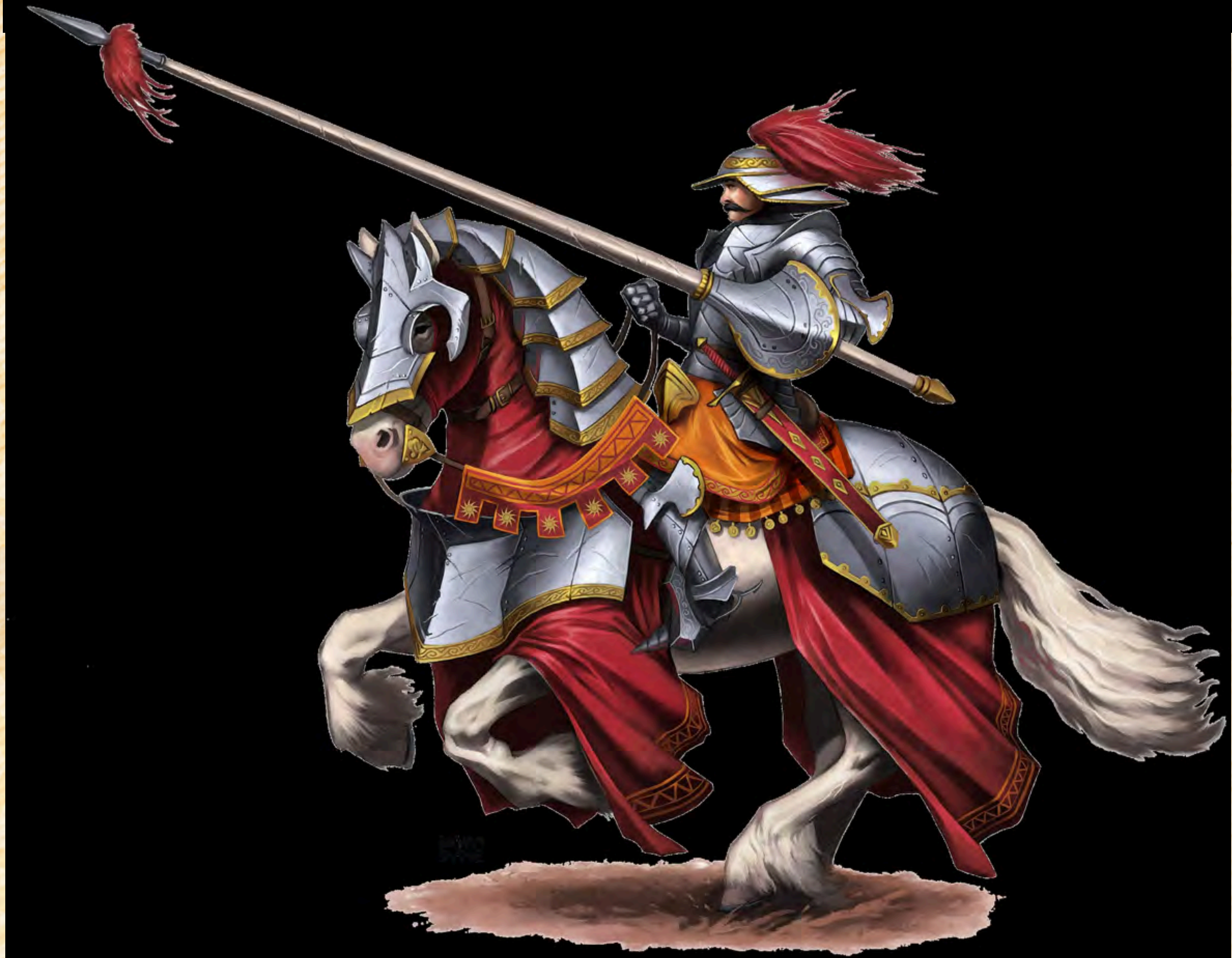


The Order of the Undying Sun is strongest in the Magdar Kingdom and the canton of Grisal, with a lesser presence in the Free City of Zobeck. Hundreds of knights serve in dozens of small and major commanderies from the Wagenstein to the Ruby Sea and the borders of the Mharoti Empire. The order is widely admired, and the Queen of the Magdar Kingdom would never think of excluding its Grand Marshall Lord Clarikon from her deliberations when the season of war approaches. Its scarred and devoted warriors each fight harder than half-a-dozen mercenaries, and their unwavering devotion to high ideals makes them the elite backbone of the Magdar's army.

Though known for its outstanding heavy cavalry, the order also raises most other troops, though rarely archers. These include companies of warrior-priests of Khors in war wagons, swift White Riders who primarily act as scouts and skirmishers, and even companies of devout pike fighters who serve a season for pay and honor (the "Sunset Regiments," so-called because their service sees an end).

These troops obey the Provost Marshall Ulrichus Valotto, and though they are not knights, the Sunset Regiments vastly increase the order's martial power. With weapons and basic armor provided by the order's armorers, these soldiers are uniformly of a higher quality than most levied troops. Some claim the order's infantry and horse are even of higher quality than some vassals in the Magdar Kingdom.

The order's headquarters is at Wagenstein, though it also controls Smoltenberg, several small keeps in Grisal, and a smaller commandery named Gelburg outside Zobeck. It is currently building the new fortification of Neusonnenstein in the south and recently lost the castle of Zamak Petros with the fall of Illyria.



the title of knight-novice. Though the knight-novice now answers to the order's captains and commanders rather than the senior knight, such young warriors remain junior figures within the order.

Paladins of Khors

The elite of the order (and most of its officers) are paladins of Khors. Their white- and yellow-plumed helmets are striking and distinctive, as are their blue cloaks and the white or dappled gray horses they favor. Most speak the Magdar dialect or Common (with a Magdar accent), and they are generous to their friends and implacable against their foes. Their light truly does shine brighter than most, and their bright swords cut through the darkness.

Zobeck's council gives them little respect because the order supported the wrong (losing) side during the Revolt, but everywhere else, the white plumes of Khors are a sign of righteous might and outstanding skill. They include dwarves and centaurs in their ranks, but by far the majority are human.

Order of the Storm

The major rivals to the knights of the Undying Sun are the somewhat rougher and less disciplined outriders of Perun, a much smaller faith among the Magdar. They include human, dwarven, and centaur members in their ranks, and their Grand Master is Larina Perunal, a daughter of the Baroness Margit of Sveretska.

Members of the order are excellent light cavalry in the field, fearless and bold as any knight, though in peace time they spend a good deal of effort on drinking and talking of pilgrimages to the Seat of Mavros or to proselytize among the Rothenian centaurs. Though they do not equal the number of the sun-knights, their major castle at Valtros is a strategic one along the southern road and the Mharoti border, and their service is honored and respected by the crown. Those who think of them less charitably say, "Not everyone can be a servant of the sun."

Magdar War Wagons

The copper-clad armored wagons are built in Cronepisht with iron wheel rims from the Revskaya Foundry, leather yokes from Ironcrags, and oxen to pull the wagons from the Magdar's best herds. The army paints its war wagons in the red, green, and yellow colors traditional to the land from Sveretska to Cronepisht. Their wood is oak or ash, enchanted and strengthened by alchemy.

On the open plains, when the Dragon Empire's elementalists unleash the jinn of thunder, lightning, wind, and fire, the copper-sheathed bulwarks of the war wagons are a vital bulwark against their magic. The copper is grounded against lightning and proof against fire, and the cover they provide is crucial. Better still, a wagon fortress protects all those within it and provides ready-made lookout points; guards standing atop the war wagons can see farther and spot enemies sooner.

To keep the wagons from being overturned, the front and rear wheel of neighboring wagons are built to slightly different widths. This allows the soldiers to chain them together when formed up into a tabor (or wagon-camp). In addition, some of the larger wagons are fitted with ballast stones in a compartment under the wagon. This lowers their center of gravity and makes them almost impossible to capsize.

Company Wagons

Not all wagons are owned by the Magdar Kingdom. Many are outfitted in the Zobeck Gear District for use by mercenaries: the pike and crossbow companies of the Ironcrags, the exile companies that fled from Krakova, and the amazon companies of Perunalia. These company wagons travel in small groups of 2 to 10 wagons, depending on the size of the adventuring company or mercenary company that uses them.

They provide all the same advantages with one further consideration: drawn by powerful oxen and fitted with strong axles, the company wagons can carry a great deal of treasure from adventuring, plundering, or banditry. Though the ballast compartments of the war wagons are usually filled with stones, a successful company wagon will sometimes say, "We carried gold and silver ballast, so rich were we!"

LOCATIONS IN THE MAGDAR KINGDOM

The Magdar lands are rife with history, although not all of it pleasant.

Baccho's Vineyard: In the Smolten Hills, one ancient vineyard dedicated to the god Baccho recently grew with incredible abandon, sprouting grape vines and arbors before the snow entirely left the hills and attracting children of the briars to the nearby territory. Several reports claim that lantern dragonettes have been spotted there by night, and the most sensational report claims that a company of elves and their tents have been visiting the vineyard each full moon, the traditional date of Baccho's greatest revels and holiest sacraments.

A mission to attempt to contact the elves and perhaps win some assistance against the Mharoti has been repeatedly proposed, and attempted once. However, the sole expedition sent into the bramble-strewn hillside found empty wine jugs and scraps of cloth and silk, little more than might be expected from a noble's tryst or a gathering of a civilized group of fey such as gnomes or shadow fey. Proof of a portal to the Summer Lands or an elven scouting party is so far elusive, but wild rumors in the Magdar villages are already claiming that "the elves will return to fend off the dragon armies" and asserting that "hosts of the fair folk and the lancers of Valeresh" are just around the corner. Disappointment seems likely.

Erdovar: This town on the Templine River once provided a great deal of timber and a rich harvest of walnuts and fine venison to towns farther into the Magdar heartland. It was burned out overnight, and the survivors spoke of a great cave dragon that burst in under the city walls—followed by hideous, reeking soldiers that slaughtered almost everyone. The town has been abandoned for decades.

ADVENTURES IN THE MAGDAR KINGDOM

Adventures here involve defending the southern border against White Mountain bandits and Mharoti raiders, as well as the old eastern barony of Runkelsheim from centaur raids.

- The Runkelstad Wands have a problem; their usual supply of ebony has failed to arrive from Triolan merchants who usually deliver it. The heroes must find out which group of bandits waylaid it—and discover those bandits were hired by Gellert the Gruesome, master of the Scarlet Citadel.
- Castle Valtros needs a group of hardened scouts and wizards to raid the Mharoti for a change and bring back a prisoner, ideally a dragonkin officer.
- Undead are rising at the Burning Plain; some necromancer is calling up the bones of the honored dead. The party must find the source of this dark magic before the army becomes unstoppable.
- Rascals and rat-demons from Zobeck are infesting Khorsburg. This is a minor cult, but it must be rooted out before it can grow dangerous.

PERUNALIA

This nation of strong and beautifu
the mouth of the River Argent. Th
Daughter, as outsiders call it, lies s
from the Free City and is a land of
people of Zobeck for two reasons:
River Argent's connection to land
shores of the Ruby Sea, and its ma
country is ruled by the demigodde
the daughter of Perun, god of war
greatest god of the East.

However, Perun's child is not m
the demigod takes after her huma
called Mother Illyena. Vasilka is a
learning and a demigoddess of cou
stern mercy. She did inherit an un
tactics from her father's bloodline
the duchy on numerous occasions

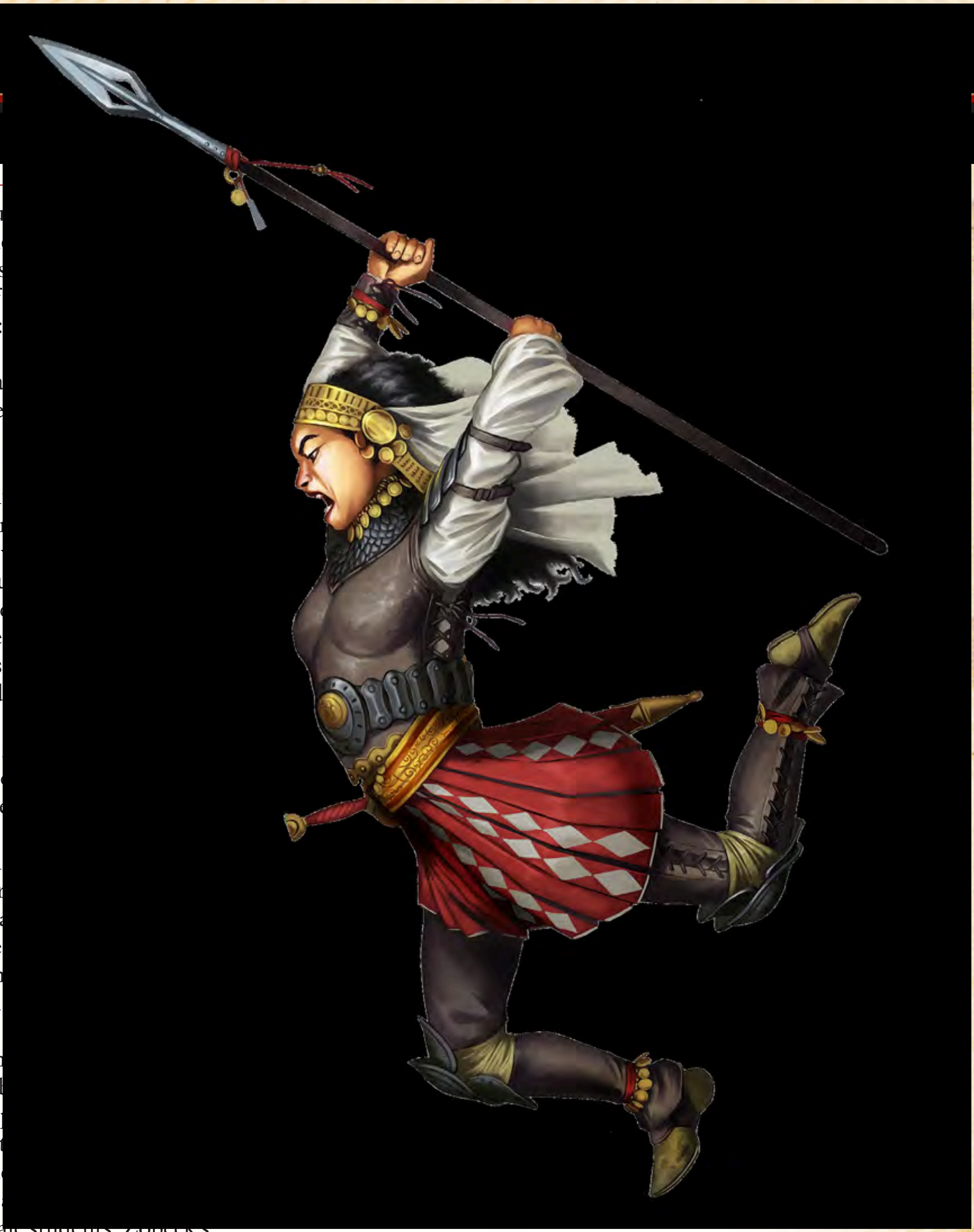
Perunalia is small but well ruled
and oysters from the river mouth,
and fine jewel work, and in divine
trades will ever raise the land to gl
people happy, healthy, and give th
trade, and the pursuit of art.

Aside from the Magocracy of Al
land most given to education, liter
lore from ancient times, befitting
seat of the elven empire, when the
among the Summer Gardens in th
duchy's learning is not focused on
practical matters of mathematics,
architecture, all of which enrich th
people. The Royal Konytari, the li
is a wing of the royal palace; it is o
each week. The Perunalians accep
the Crossroads region into their a
those from the Magdar Kingdom
of Morgau, but they never take male students. Zobeck's Azeleanara Perunisis, a retired Perunalian emigrant, sponsors several annual scholarships for worthy girls to attend Sephaya's schools.

Oddly, worship and theology are relatively neglected. Her Divine Transcendence, the Duchess Vasilka, grants boons and answers prayers to a small priesthood, though most of her people also follow the Green Gods and worship Lada as well as several of the other greater gods.

Vasilka's power provides a bulwark against the centaurs and the bandits of the Ruby Despotate, against the dragonborn legions of the Mharoti Empire, and (rarely) against the cunning cavalry of the Magdar Kingdom. Rivalry between the Magdar and Perunalians has waned with the Mharoti threat on their doorstep.

With raiding centaurs, dragon legions, and the Ruby Despotate all willing to carry away the "shameless women" of Perun, the people of the duchy feel somewhat besieged.



Free City of Zobeck; their mutual alliance dates back 90 years and remains firm. Perunalia is entirely capable of defending her people, though the duchy also hires entire centaur clans to aid in keeping the Mharoti at bay—and regularly allies with the Magdar against the Dragon Empire, their common foe. The Perunalian warrior tradition is primarily a female one: visitors remark on how strange it is to see only female city guards at the gates and are impressed when they see the duchess's horse guards riding by—every one of them a woman of skill and daring. The typical Perunalian response is a somewhat wry, "We have no idea why you trust men with swords and fire, given how they act with it." The most powerful of her defenders are the amazons of Perunalia.

Women who flee the Ruby Despotate, Blood Kingdom, or the Magdar Kingdom to the duchy's borders are welcomed and put to work as soldiers, weavers, and farmers.

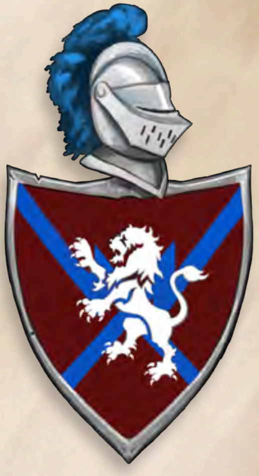
The Perunalian generals and marshals of the Order of the White Lions—a society of female paladins—are canny enough to raise levies from both men and women alike in times of war. The men, it is said, are inspired to greater courage by the bravery of the amazons who lead them.

The duchy is not entirely gloriously enlightened, selfless, and wise; the merchants of Zobeck consider Perunalians an especially sharp set of traders who sometimes take goods by force to feed their troops or negotiate contracts at sword point. The duchy is a realm like no other, and its people would have it no other way.

Within Perunalia, men are treated as the weaker sex, more for their assumed mental abilities rather than their physical ones. The female rulers deem men too driven by emotions like envy, rage, and sexual desire to take up the serious duties of defense, war, government, and business. Men's roles are therefore reserved for child rearing, maintaining households, and performing limited manual labor, in which their physical strength gives them an advantage. Hard work tempers them, gentling their emotions and making them more pliable for mating. Men may not own property or receive formal education.

Merchant and artisan trades, mining, soldiering, scholarship, and most other trades are reserved for women, but Perunalia's men do apprentice in certain allowable trades, performing jobs like blacksmithing, farming, shipbuilding, lumberjacking, animal husbandry, and the like. Their wives take care of the money gained from such endeavors, and they provide any needed protection.

PERUNALIA, THE DUCHY OF PERUN'S DAUGHTER



SYMBOL: A red shield with blue lightning and a white lion rampant

RULER: Her Divine Transcendence, the Duchess Vasilka Soulay (LN female legendary human cleric 20 [Perun])

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: Baroness Kialora Sarsz of Sephaya (LN female human); Baroness Renloryn Perkenla of Orkasa (LG female human); Baroness Oshera Maltare of Clarsaya (LG female human); Lynasha Perunisis, Grand Paladin of the Order of the White Lions (LG female human); High Priestess Connisal Delore (LN female human); Her Radiance Eudora Glasren (NG female human); Aglaii Soulay, Mistress of the Tower of Clarsaya (LG female human); High Commander Shihara Poulimas (LG female human); Ogolai Kiyat, High Priest of the Green Gods (CG male centaur)

POPULATION: 190,500 (186,000 humans, 4,500 centaurs)

CAPITAL: Sephaya, population 20,500 (19,600 humans, 900 centaurs)

CITIES: Orkasa, population 12,500 (12,000 humans, 500 centaurs); Clarsaya, population 7,600 (all humans)

TOWNS: Portocale, population 4,200; Oysterhaven population 2,300; House of Owls population 1,200

CASTLES: Thunder's Seat, White Citadel

GREAT GODS: Perun (patron), Baccholon, Lada, Yarila and Porevit, Sif

TRADE GOODS: Fine cloth, divine magic, fish, furniture, honey, oranges, jewelry, oysters, timber

DUCHESS VASILKA SOULAY

Her Divine Transcendence spends much of her time in contemplation and study. She is a fair ruler and patroness of learning and the arts. She has a strong interest in artistic items from the Seven Cities and collects pottery, sculptures, and paintings from all over Midgard. She believes that all students should be exposed to such works. She holds bards in high esteem, and she frequently invites female bards to visit Sephaya. Some choose to stay.

Vasilka has yet to marry and provide heirs since she is too enraptured with her daily studies. She is said to have several eunuch lovers, but she has not found a man interesting enough to warrant her long-term protection and provision, let alone her attention. This does not stop her baronesses and priestesses from urging her to marry and produce an heir.

CITIES AND TOWNS OF PERUNALIA

The cities of Perunalia are well governed with local rulers and duchesses alike proud to serve their people. Its towns often retain well-kept elements of the elven period under the Eagle Emperor.

SEPHAYA

An ancient city of the elves, Sephaya was briefly an elven capital, abandoned in the Great Retreat. Currently the capital city, it is often besieged by the Mharoti. Sephaya is known for beautiful architecture and its elaborate gardens, diligently cared for by 100 gardeners. It is said the duchess sometimes converses with Lada, Sif, and Yarila and Porevit within the gardens.

The duchess's palace hosts the Perunalian Palatial Library. Several grandiose academies encircle the palace's outer gates, forming the educational hub of the capital. Sephaya boasts one of the largest literacy rates in Midgard at 25% of its female population. All girls are welcome to attend the schools, but not all families view book learning as important to their daughters' futures. Many prefer that they learn the art of war instead, and archery is taught to young women from the age of 14 and sometimes younger.

CLARSAYA

A small city at the confluence of the Argent and the Palesh Rivers that was once a small elven settlement. Clarsaya still hosts a huge tower that provides excellent visibility over the horizon, and that structure defines the town. The current Mistress of the Tower is Aglaii Soulay, a cousin of the duchess. Aglaii is a high-ranking paladin in the Order of the White Lions and commander of the northern vanguard garrisoned here against the centaurs. She is well known for her amiable relationships with the centaurs of the region and her celestial pseudodragon familiar. The White Citadel, the training grounds for the white lion paladins, lies outside the city. High Commander Shihara Poulimas rules the citadel.

ORKASA

A human city from the start, and a trade center up to Zobeck and down to Harkesh and the Middle Sea, Orkasa is famous for its barge polers, many of whom are from Kariv families, who compete with the local Perunalians for shipping work. The rivalries sometimes turn to bloodshed. For this reason, there is some friction between the Kariv and Perunalians in this part of the duchy.

OYSTERHAVEN

A fishing village that maintains a stout stone wall due to the threat of raiders from the Ruby Despotate and the Mharoti. Known for consistently stunning white, pink, and even black pearls.

PORTOCALE

Known for fruit trees and flowers, Portocale is a sweet-smelling river town that retains many traces of its days as an elven bastion of rich crops. It still grown lemons, oranges, hazelnuts, and vast fields of roses for its queen and for the people; most are eaten locally but some travel great distances as luxury items.

ULEBAIN, THE HOUSE OF OWLS

This small town retains its elven name (Ulebain) in Common, and its foresters are well acquainted with the giant owls and more ordinary owls of the nearby Gennecka Forest. A small circle of druids maintains a sacred grove nearby, and a famous temple of Baccholon stands on the edge of vineyards. Its keeper, the priestess Tiona Tallgrass (CG female elfmarked cleric 5 [Baccholon]), is one of the few elfmarked in Perunalia.

LOCATIONS IN PERUNALIA

The following few locales in and around Perunalia offer opportunities to those seeking adventure.

STORM COURT OF PERUN

High above the earth, the Storm Court is the literal home of the god of war and thunder, the divine patron of the realm. Its dark towers and lightning-infused halls provide refuge for female warriors who died in service of the war god, a place where they feast each night and rise again each dawn to praise Perun and smite evil once more. While the Storm Court is still seen once a year at Orkasa, it seems that the Duchess Vasilka can no longer command it to appear elsewhere. It's unclear whether this is a mark of Perun's disfavor or his distraction by other wars and other prayers. Certainly, it is holy ground and a place all the duchy's priests of Perun hope to visit, to be blessed by its holy thunder and to hear the voice of Perun in person.

SUMMER GARDENS OF QUEEN OSILESSI

Deep in the Gennecka Forest lies one of the most remote of the cities of the Elven Empire of Valera: the Summer Garden of Queen Osilessi, sometimes referred to simply as Osilessidra after the city's founder, prime architect, and ruler. Queen Osilessi sought to restore a "purely elven" ruling caste to the Fourth Empire in the days after the establishment of the magocracies in the west, and her judges, governors, generals, and administrators were all noble elves of impeccable pedigree and (in most cases) great learning. She sought to remove their work from the day-to-day of petitioners and supplicants by building a city of shining glass, fragrant trellises, and soothing brooks and streams where two smaller ley lines converged.

This made access easy for those capable of following the shadow roads and extremely difficult otherwise since the roads and paths through the forest were little more than deer trails and log bridges. Osilessidra became a place of harmony and joy and elven arts, but when the ley lines shook and the elves retreated to the Summer Lands, this city quickly fell into decay since there was no way to supply it and its people had left. It is haunted now by griffons nesting in its towers, by drakes and children of the briars, and by a small cadre of gnomes who maintain its libraries, its throne room, and a few other chambers of the queen. Some say its treasury retains a few treasures too heavy or too mundane for the elves to have taken in the retreat—no one knows for sure.

The Mharoti have made attempts to cut timber from the Gennecka, to create a road, and to build an outpost within the forest. Arrows and spells from forest dwellers have slain their leaders with remarkable aim each time. Rogue druids, elfmarked bandits, and a reclusive elven enchantress named the Apple Baroness defend the forest in the name of Queen Osilessi.

THUNDER'S SEAT

This castle was once the home of the White Lions, but it has been abandoned since various haunts and spirits attack it each night. The source of these hauntings may lie not far to the east with the Master of Demon Mountain. He seems to have found the castle's position on the edge of the Rothenian Plain threatening, or had other reasons for waging arcane summoner's war against the site. Though it pained them to abandon it, the White Lions were ordered south to help the Magdar defend themselves after the battle of Marroc's Stand. Thunder's Seat now is often a base of operations for centaur raiders and occasionally visited by a company of Perunalian archers or scouts to make sure that the site is not held permanently against them.

ARCHERY IN PERUNALIA

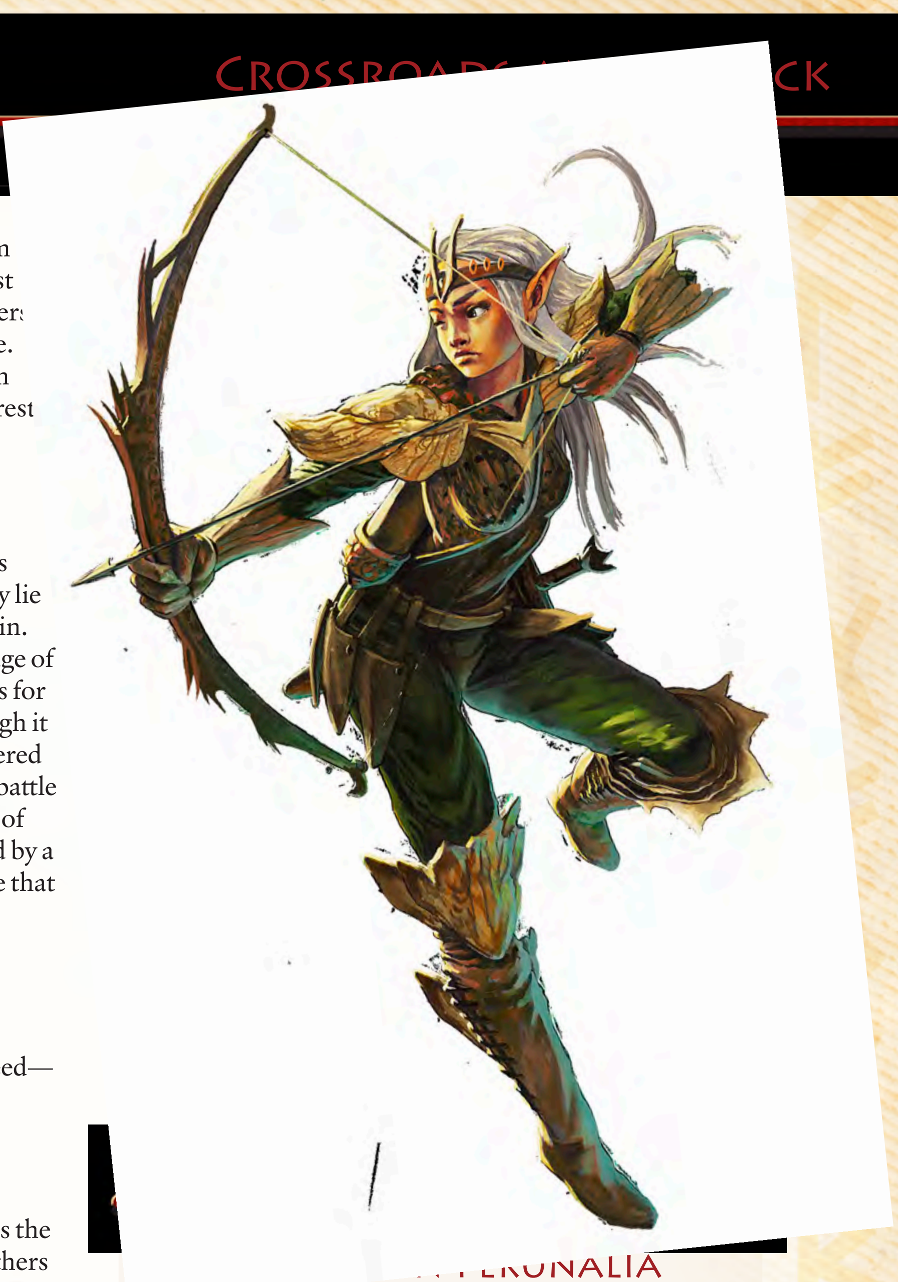
The archery skills of Perunalia's women are famed throughout Midgard and are said to rival—if not exceed—those of the Arbonesse elves.

The temples recount that Perun himself taught the amazons their skill with bow and arrow, though his ever-cunning daughters have since enhanced their god-taught skills with secrets culled from races such as the Rothenian centaurs, the windrunner elves, and any others they deem worthy enough to teach them.

Perunalian women eat, sleep, and breathe archery; to be a woman devoid of such skill in the duchy is to be an outcast. Mothers gift their daughters with small bows and arrows in rites of passage ceremonies when their girls turn 14 and send them to train at the best archery schools throughout the land. Additional rites of passage follow as the girls age and prove certain skills with the bow at the monthly tournaments. Colorful feathers, which outsiders deem as mere decoration, mark an amazon's archery rank among her peers. An amazon bearing the red feather has mastered her weapon.

The small tournaments offer a proving ground for advancing archers to gain their feathers, but the Duchess's Fair, the duchy's famous summer fair and tournament, offers opportunities for invited archers to vie for the duchess's favor in the form of land grants and titles. The annual winner is called the Grand Maiden, and she is showered with gifts from admirers wherever she goes.

Grand Maiden Countess Marquerra Zorin has held the title for well over a decade now.

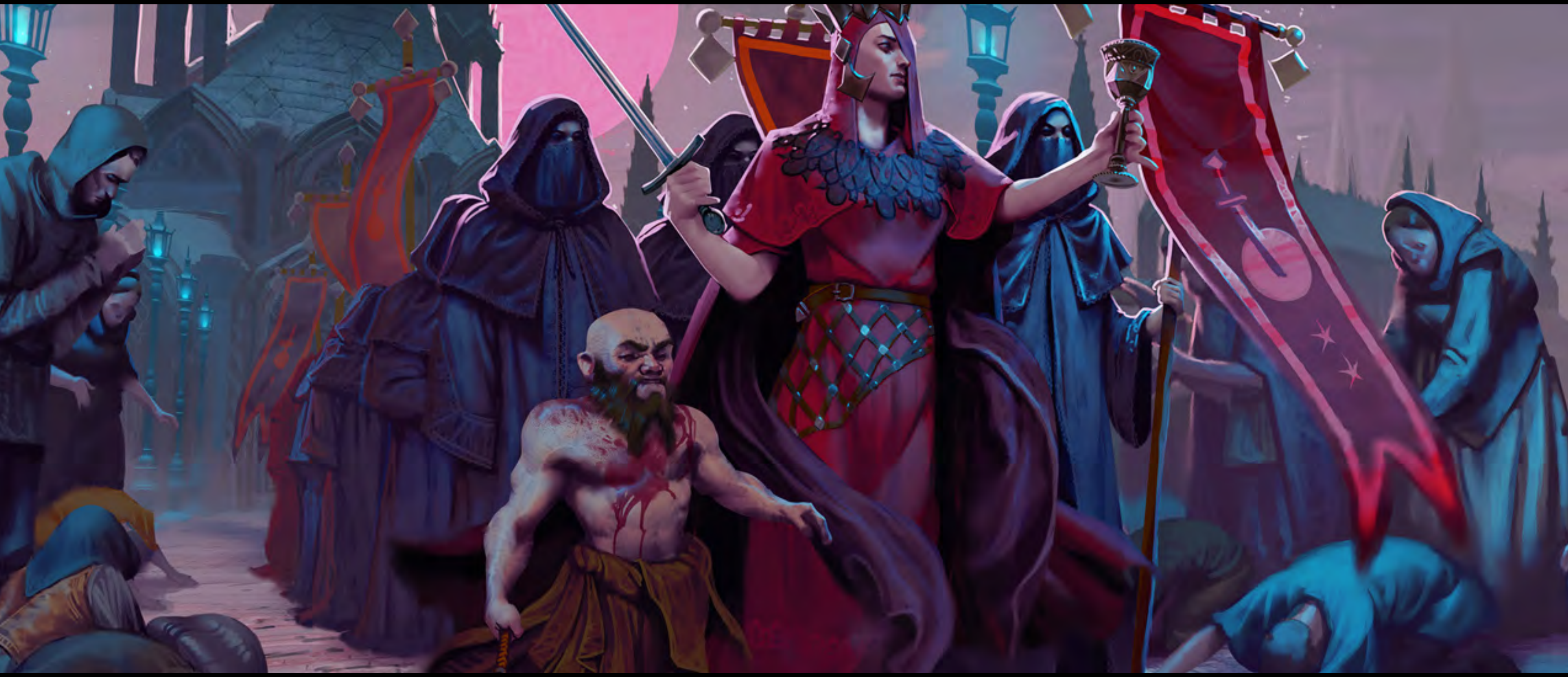


ERUNALIA

Adventures in Perunalia involve the daring deeds of the White Lions, fighting centaurs and slavers, or questing after kidnapped menfolk.

- The party is asked to investigate a missing noble of 10 years old; he's gone from the royal palace, and his minders believe he was polymorphed into a cat by a curse. He may have simply gone fishing with friends, but the whole matter should be investigated with some degree of discretion.
- The Mharoti are scouting the Gennecka forest with an eye toward burning out a stronghold in it somewhere. The heroes are encouraged to drive them out of the area.
- The slavers of Reth Saal have captured the Mayor of Oysterhaven, and are holding her for an exchange—one of their demonship captains is due to be executed by the duchess. A rescue attempt needs to be mounted against Reth-Saal quickly, to show the Despotate the price of raiding Perunalia shores.

DARK KINGDOMS



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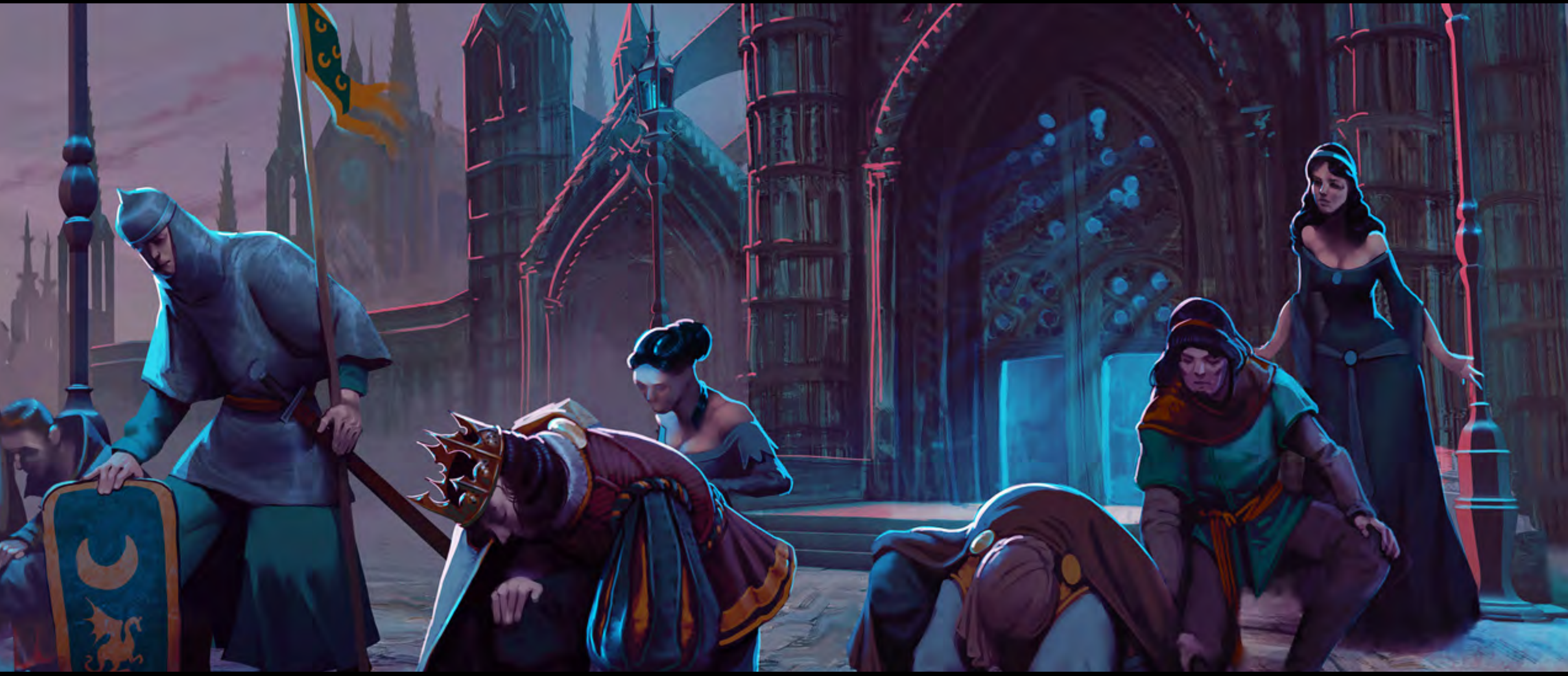
Northeast of the Free City of Zobeck lie three dark and twisted kingdoms, nicknamed the "Triumvirate of Evil" by cynical, seasoned travelers who know to avoid this region of Midgard unless one's need is truly desperate or the opportunity to turn a profit is inordinately great.

Emerging from the ancient and dense forest of the Margreve, the Great Northern Road crosses into the notorious Blood Kingdom of Morgau, a joyless land ruled by vampires whose borders recently expanded to encompass its northern neighbor, the former Electoral Kingdom of Krakova. Deep beneath Morgau lies the second dark kingdom—the Ghoul Imperium, a terrifying empire of flesh-eating ghouls who have conquered the other races of the underworld to serve as both slaves and food. In the forests to the east of Krakovar is the third of the triumvirate: the Nine Cities of Niemheim, a kingdom of infernal gnomes who turned to devil-worship in a desperate attempt to save themselves from the infamous Baba Yaga.

Adventurers bold enough to brave these evil lands are best advised to keep their wits about them and to have an escape plan at the ready.



A high priestess of the Red Goddess parades among her new flock in Krakovar.

THE BLOOD KINGDOM

The infamous Blood Kingdom of Morgau has remained a brooding, menacing presence north of the Margreve Forest and Free City of Zobeck for centuries. The Greater Duchy of Morgau—to use its proper name—includes the twin Principalities of Morgau and Doresh, and a third province, Krakovar, made up of the conquered lands of the former Electoral Kingdom of Krakova to the north. A gloomy land of mist-shrouded mountains, steep gorges, and dark forests, Morgau is ruled by vampires, ghouls, and other intelligent undead. Their cold hands control a nightmare realm where peasants suffer without hope or sanctuary.

The kingdom is beset on all sides by enemies—ferocious reaver dwarves to the north (including those right on the doorstep in the Wolfmark), the Grand Duchy of Dornig to the northwest, the Rothenian Plain to the east, the Ironcrag Cantons to the southwest, and Zobeck to the south. The Greater Duchy's list of enemies also includes Grandmother Baba Yaga, the Daughters of Perun, and the exiled former queen of Krakova. The vampires could deal with any one of these foes individually without too much trouble, but the combined alliances against the undead nobles lead them to take a more considered approach, holding the passes when they must and raiding the lowlands with fire and sword whenever they can. Morgau draws special hatred for its tendency to wage winter wars and to fight by night, both conditions that favor its undead soldiers and make life hard for its enemies. Those enemies return the favor in daylight hours when vampiric officers rest and ghoulish sergeants avoid the searing sun.

For the most part, the wars remain small: holding a village for a season, despoiling a graveyard for new troops, laying waste to crops, or turning an enemy's child into a ghoul or vampiric spawn. The Greater Duchy of Morgau does not wish to make friends, only to terrify its neighbors and dissuade them from denying its undead sovereignty.

Equally as important, raids and warfare keep the kingdom's neighbors from spreading the seeds of rebellion among the living who suffer beneath the undying gentry. The peasants of Morgau, restless and fearful, long to shake off their masters. Despite their undeniable strength of arms, the one war the undead nobles can never win is the one waged for the hearts of their people.

Most right-thinking people acknowledge that the price of civilization includes extracting taxes and enforcing laws, which makes any ruling class bloodsuckers in a sense. But living creatures outside the Blood Kingdom believe that the undead aristocracy's demands for their subjects' warm blood and cold corpses exceed any reasonable standard. Some citizens think their undead masters' command of death and darkness is a glorious beginning, but most living folk realize that Morgau is a place of suffering. They obey their masters and fight in their armies out of fear rather than patriotism since doing anything else invites reprisals against their families or forced enlistment in the "bone company."

As a result, the army is led by its officers, and its success comes from undead troops and ghoulish darakhul mercenaries. The darakhul are the true ghouls who dwell in their own lands below the earth; they are both entirely evil and among the best troops the Greater Duchy can field. Great victories in battle, however, are secondary to the vampire nobles' desires. They wisely join together to field the best troops whenever a real threat appears. Everything else—the raids, the constant drumbeat of war, the slave taking—serves to keep the border in flux and their neighbors off balance.

Living under Vampire Rule

In the Blood Kingdom of Morgau, vampires roam openly and rule proudly. Depravity, decadence, and the worship of dark gods abound. Here, the living are little more than property, drained and dispatched as the vampires see fit.

Many living slaves long for their masters to drain them of blood, so they can escape the "tortures of the living" and gain social status as vampires. Vampire masters occasionally grant such rewards. A new vampire lives under the command of the vampire that sired it and remains enslaved until the sire's destruction. Each enslaved vampire can sire and enslave vampires of its own, creating a pyramid of control with the free-willed master vampire at the summit, known as the Tree of Chains. A clever slave makes plans for this before he receives the death-bite, such as hiring assassins (or do-good heroes) to kill his sire afterward. This frees the slave-turned-vampire from mental enslavement on the master's tree.

The Blood Kingdom frequently hosts hunts in its hills and forests and stages gladiatorial fights in its cities. During these spectacles, living combatants clash and vampires cheer and salivate at the blood that sprays into the stands. This foreplay lasts for hours before culminating in a vampire's blood drain of the winner, and that lucky winner's rise into the ruling class.

Once a year, tradition demands that a vampire elder free the winner rather than kill him. An arcane taboo marks the champion and grants him perpetual freedom from all vampire predation. One of these souls, a fighter named Emmon Trond, recently emigrated to the Free City of Zobeck where he fights in a gladiatorial arena called the Pit of the Fierce Lynx under the Kobold Ghetto (see page 59).

King Lucan

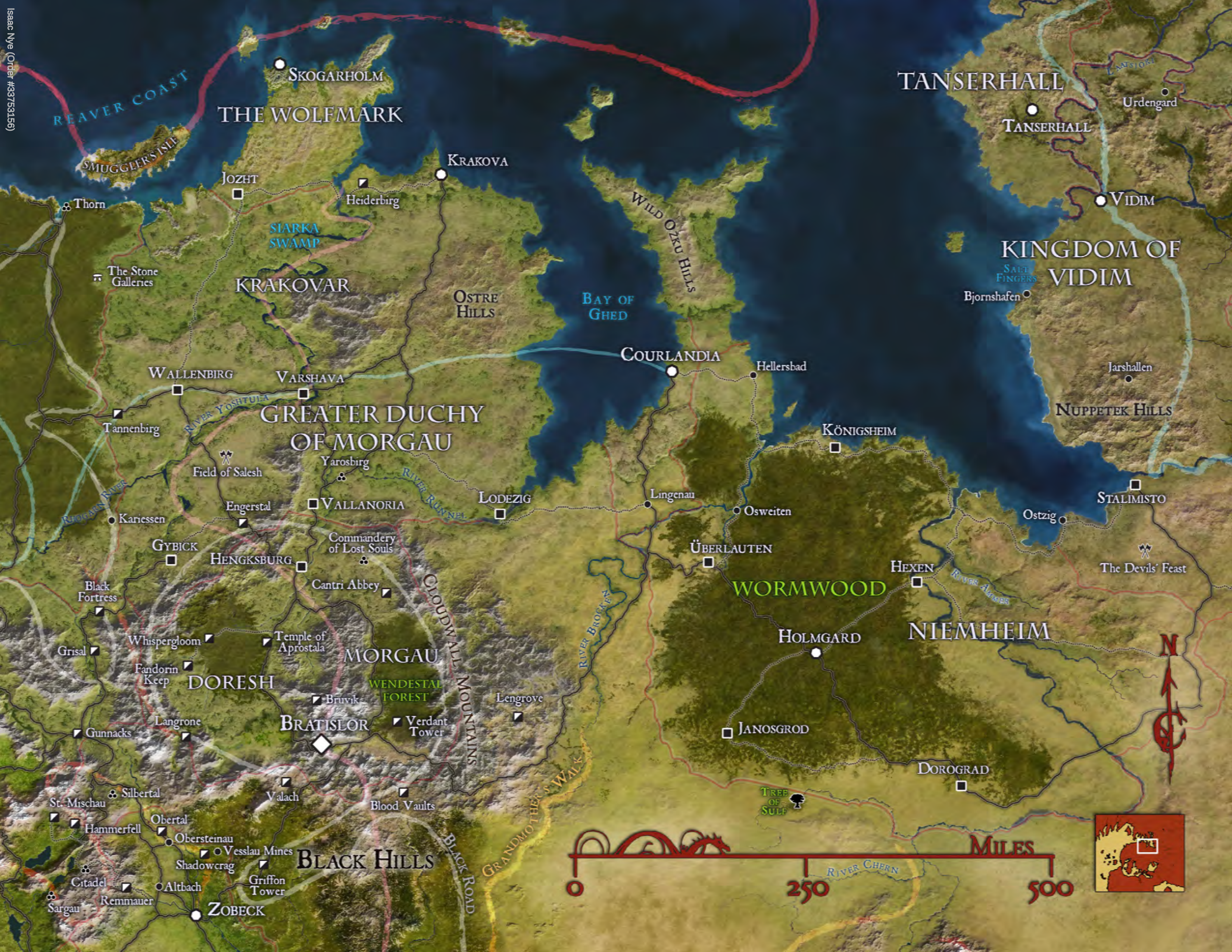
With the takeover of a third province, Lucan, the Lord of the Shroud-Eaters, has proclaimed himself king of the Greater Duchy of Morgau. His pattern of conquest and usurpation is well established. Soon after the Ruby Despotate-born Lucan arrived in the Principality of Morgau some 300 years ago, he became the right-hand man (and possibly lover) of the ruling prince. Shortly thereafter, the priests of Lada the Golden Goddess sickened and died. Then the priests of the Green Gods fled into the forests where they were hunted down, and the land's prince disappeared. Later, many of the court nobles became nocturnal servants of their new prince.

Within a year of his arrival, Lucan had utterly and completely taken control of the Principalities of Morgau and Doresh, and any who questioned the old prince's whereabouts found themselves exiled to the least desirable fiefdoms and given the most grueling or expensive tasks.

Nobles of the Blood Kingdom

The chains of blood and fealty in Morgau are heavy and tightly held. At the top stands King Lucan, together with various princes, princesses, dukes, and duchesses. These are Lucan's favorites, his vampiric peers, and those he has sired directly. Below them stand the counts and countesses, primarily vampires less powerful than the rulers themselves. They hold large territories or powerful monasteries. Below them are the generals or governors, called the voivode or voivodina, commanding troops or ruling a smaller fiefdom.

Below the counts and voivodes are the lesser nobles, divided into the vor and voyra (literally "blood thieves" or "takers," but meaning something closer to noble vampire),


Tanserhall
Tanserhall
Laatsjoki
Urdengard
Vidim
Kingdom of Vidim
Salt Fingers
Bjornshafen
Jarshallen
Nuppetek Hills
Skogarholm
The Wolfmark
Reaver Coast
Smugglers' Isle
Krakova
Jozht
Heiderbirg
Thorn
Siarka Swamp
The Stone Galleries
Krakovar
Wild Ozku Hills
Ostre Hills
Bay of Ghed
Courlandia
Hellersbad
Wallenbirg
Varshava
Tannenbirg
River Yoshtula
Greater Duchy of Morgau
Yarosbirg
Field of Salesh
River Runnel
Lodezig
Vallanoria
Engerstal
Rhogarn River
Kariessen
Gybick
Hengksburg
Commandery of Lost Souls
Cantri Abbey
Black Fortress
Königsheim
Lingenau
Osweiten
Überlauten
Stalimisto
Ostzig
The Devils' Feast
Hexen
River Aasvi
Wormwood
Niemheim
Holmgard
Janosgrod
Dorograd
Tree of Sulf
River Broken
Cloudwall Mountains
Morgau
Wendestal Forest
Whispergloom
Temple of Aprostala
Grisal
Fandorin Keep
Doresh
Bruvik
Lengrove
Verdant Tower
Bratislor
Langrone
Gunnacks
Valach
Blood Vaults
Silbertal
St. Mischau
Obertal
Hammerfell
Obersteinau
Vesslau Mines
Shadowcrag
Black Hills
Griffon Tower
Citadel
Altbach
Remmauer
Sargau
Zobeck
Black Road
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the barons, and gospodar and gospoda (lord and lady). While all noble and not to be trifled with, some of these nobles are darakhul or even prominent humans.

Below these are positions of relative merit. A red priestess is often called a chelnik (a title that also means judge and executioner), and a young undead noble might be referred to as a stavilac (groom, squire, and cupbearer). A stavilac may also, in some cases, be an undead lover to a greater noble.

Finally, the term *sevast* simply means ancient or venerable and denotes great respect, an elevated condition of honor and worth. It is used almost exclusively by humans to refer to undead lords and nobles.

The Red Goddess

Following Lucan's usurpation, veneration of the Red Goddess Marena spread throughout the principalities. All the nobles took up her worship, though some retained their fondness for St. Charon or the Red Goddess's husband Mavros, the War God. In time, the common people embraced her, whether they feared her aspect as the goddess of death and respected or leered over her aspect as a goddess of lust and fertility.

The cities and villages of the greater duchy are now devoted to the Red Goddess with all other deities second to her in importance. Worship is frequent and public; offerings are loud and messy. Every village of any size contains at least a small blood-stained altar stone, and her name is invoked at every birth, funeral, and battle.

Marena's main temples include the Temple of the Scourging Goddess in Vallanoria, where Marena's cult of slaughter worships death and mayhem; Cantri Abbey in the Cloudwall Mountains, where the matronly Mother Abbess Calle protects pregnant women; and the Temple of Aprostala on the edge of the Walkers' Wood, where the altar runs red with daily sacrifices. At these temples reside Marena's greatest zealots, the Flagellants of the Red Goddess, also known as the Order of the Rosy Salvation.

Order of the Knights Incorporeal (Ghost Knights)

The Ghost Knights of Morgau rise from interesting origins: many of them were living creatures who chose to join the ranks of the undead as a method of advancement. The knights enter the order as living men and women, bound to the service of a vampire, darakhul necromancer, or priestess of Marena. If they provide good service for 5 or 10 years, they might be "raised up" into the ranks of the undead as foot soldiers in the Ghost Knights, roughly equivalent to a squire elsewhere.

If they provide additional good service and make the transition through ghoul fever or vampiric bite without undue madness or blood frenzy, they may slowly advance through the grades of the Order of the Red Shield: the ranks being Initiate Brother/Sister, Honest Brother/Sister, Master of Arms, Captain of Arms, General at Arms, Commander, and Grand Marshall.

Ghost Knights receive excellent equipment, which typically includes a dappled gray or white warhorse, two lances, a red banner, a mace or longsword, and a tabard displaying the insignia of the order (a skull on a red background). Knights are expected to provide their own armor: leather or chain for an initiate and a full suit of plate or better for a full knight or master.

Grand Marshall Princess Hristina oversees the order and was recently proclaimed Protector and Duchess of Krakovar, the Greater Duchy's third province, after she seized control of the capital city of Krakova.

Commander Baleneus, Hristina's lover, oversees the vital commanderies along the Great Northern Road where tolls are collected. These include the Commanderies of Valach, Bruvik, and Engerstal, and Cantri Abbey in the Cloudwall Mountains. New commanderies are under construction in Krakovar.

Commander Orkov watches over the southwest borders near Zobeck and the Ironcrags. She is responsible for the Temple of Aprostala, Commanderies of Walkers' Wood, and Langrone. The commander wages a never-ending war against the dwarves of Grisal and the other cantons. Her troops contain a much-feared "dwarven company" of prisoners taken from Grisal and turned into undead.

RECENT EVENTS IN THE BLOOD KINGDOM

The recent history of Morgau revolves around Lucan's embrace of the Red Goddess, his alliance with the darakhul, and his perhaps brilliant, perhaps foolhardy conquest of the electoral kingdom to the north.

An Unholy Alliance

King Lucan and Emperor Nicoforus the Pale have long maintained a pact of mutual aid between the Principalities of Morgau and Doresh and the Ghoul Imperium below the earth. Neither wishes the other to gain ascendancy, but it serves both kingdoms' interests to stand together should an army of paladins and priests march against them.

In the last few years, the alliance between the vampires and the ghouls has grown stronger, much to the chagrin of their neighbors. Duke Leander Stross, the Ghoul Imperium's ambassador to Morgau, was a constant presence at Lucan's court as detailed negotiations wore on while the vampires sent the silver-tongued former Countess-in-Exile Urzana Dolingen to the City of White Bone to whisper provocatively in the emperor's ear.

Eventually a new, closer agreement was forged between the two nations. No one is sure of the exact terms of the alliance, but Guildmaster Orlando of Zobeck's Arcane Collegium believes that the vampires traded ancient tomes of forbidden lore to the necrophagi of the Ghoul Imperium in exchange for military aid from elite darakhul troops against the Electoral Kingdom of Krakova. Certainly darakhul troops were involved in the siege and slaughter at each Krakovan city as it fell; those who surrendered were spared most of the looting and pillaging, but their cemeteries were despoiled.

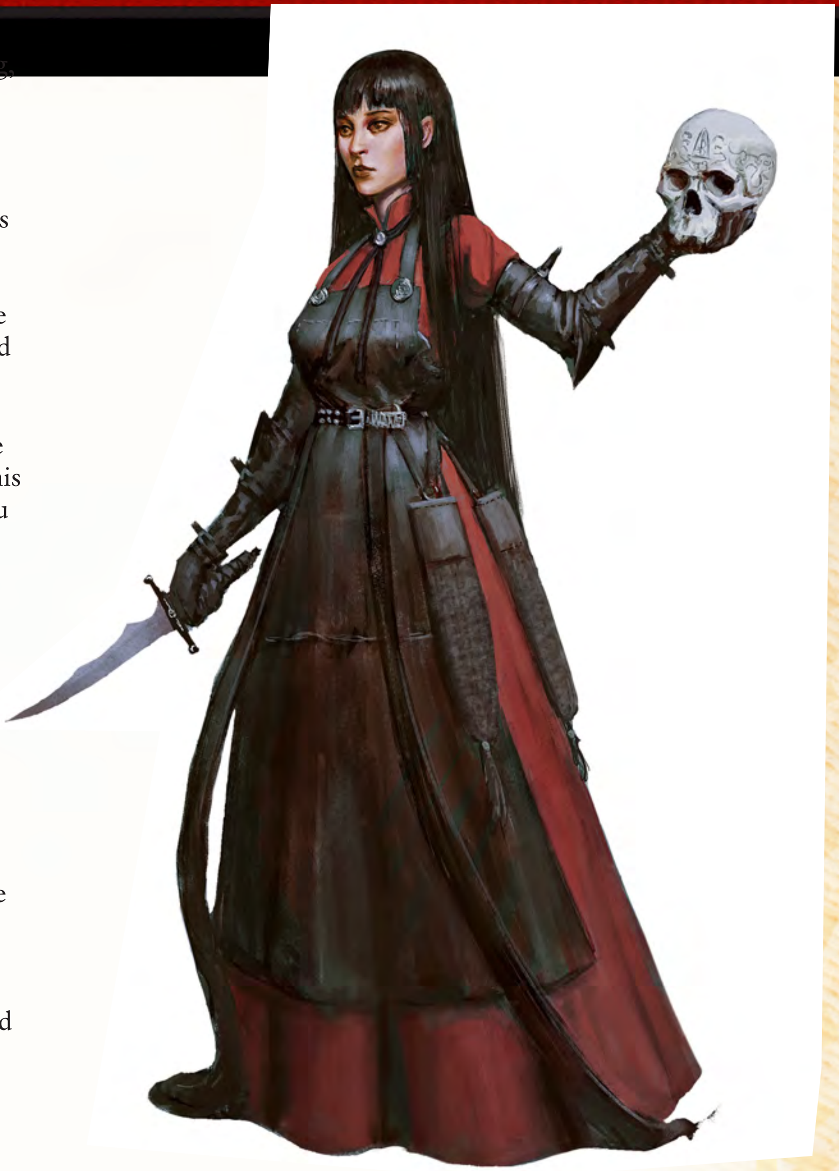
RISE OF THE BLOOD SISTERS

The crimson blood has been flowing freely on Marena's altars in Morgau for three centuries, and the Red Goddess has been most pleased. However, a few years ago her high priestess, Lileshka of the Chalice, Mother of Lust, began experiencing deeply disturbing visions in which the steady supply of fresh blood started to run dry and the Red Goddess's power began to fade.

Fearing disaster, Lileshka demanded an audience with then-Prince Lucan and told him Marena yearned for more blood. She urged the First Prince to take up arms against his enemies and conquer new territory in the name of Morgau and the Red Goddess. Now was the time to deal with the treacherous Krakovans along the Principalities' northern border and let their blood splash onto Marena's altars. Lucan promised the high priestess he would consider her words carefully and bid her a respectful farewell.

With her visions becoming more vivid and frequent, Lileshka did not want to wait for war to start before taking action, so she summoned the Red Goddess's other high-ranking priestesses to meet with her at the Temple of Aprostala. She ordered Blood Priestess Sonye of the Spear to ready the mayhem-loving warrior-priests of the Temple of the Scourging Goddess for battle should Prince Lucan decide to go to war. With Mother Abbess Calle she discussed a much subtler plan—members of the Blood Sisters cult would be dispatched from Cantri Abbey and the other temples to seek new converts and spread the Red Goddess's influence throughout the Crossroads region.

The Blood Sisters have recently founded new secret temples under the guise of brothels in Zobeck and other good-aligned cities and successfully lured dozens of new worshippers into taking part in the cult's orgiastic rituals.



FALL OF KRAKOVA

With a military alliance secured with the Ghoul Imperium and troubled by Lileshka's visions, Prince Lucan decided the time was right to strike against the Electoral Kingdom of Krakova and to seize its lands for the glory of Morgau and the Red Goddess.

The vampires had infiltrated the "mice"—the Krakovan spy network—several months earlier and fed them false intelligence to throw them off guard. Then, just as the Ghost Knights of Morgau, joined by Blood Priestess Sonye's warrior-priests of Marena and Mavros, attacked Yarosbirg Castle on the border under cover of darkness, a darakhul legion emerged from a tunnel beneath Tannenbirg Castle to the west. Neither fortress could support the other; indeed, they could not defend themselves.

The slaughter that followed was horrific—the ghouls poured out from below the earth in vast numbers, catching the Krakovans completely off guard and massacring them. As the darakhul fed on the dead, the Krakovan survivors fled north in terror. Yarosbirg fell the same night. Its defenders, though brave, were ill-equipped to deal with Ghostrider Templars on flying horses that could phase through castle walls.

In the following weeks, the Ghost Knights pushed north to the city of Varshava while the darakhul army marched northeast to Wallenbirg. Neither city held out for long. Then, just as King Eynryk was preparing to lead the Order of the Storm Knights from Heiderbirg Castle south to meet the invaders, he was assassinated in his throne room by a vampiric spy. Although the undead killer was swiftly slain, the king's death was a bitter blow to Krakovan morale. Grand Marshall Jolenta Ludmiska led the army to confront the combined undead forces, but the Krakovan soldiers based on the coast were not used to facing unliving enemies, let alone at night. The armies of Morgau won a convincing victory on the battlefield, and Krakova, City of the Mermaid, surrendered a few days later to the Ghost Knights' commander, Princess Hristina. Queen Urzula and the other surviving members of the royal family fled into exile.

With the success of the invasion, the newly titled King Lucan wasted no time in declaring Krakovar the third province of the Greater Duchy of Morgau and appointing Princess Hristina as its governor—and granting her the greater title of duchess. But as the priestesses of the Red Goddess moved in to establish new centers of worship, not everything has gone as Lucan wished. Sensing an opportunity, reaver dwarves from Wolfheim sailed across the Nieder Straits and established a beachhead at Skogarholm on the northern peninsula, threatening the city of Jozht and then seizing it for themselves. So far the dwarves have successfully defended the city against all comers and are looking to expand their territory; they have no qualms about recruiting human Krakovans who wish to flee their new rulers. Meanwhile, Queen Urzula seeks to foster resistance to the undead occupation among her former subjects from her exile in Dornig.

RAIDS INTO PERUNALIA

With the defeat of the Krakovans, the vampire nobility has grown more bold, even mounting raids beyond the Margreve Forest into distant Perunalia to carry off the beautiful amazon women of that land. One such victim, Dajana Savirne of Clarsaya, 15 years old and already an accomplished archer, has been taken to Hengksburg where she is to be presented to Rodyan, the city's debauched Lord Mayor, who is always looking for a new wife.

Furious, the paladins of the Order of the White Lions counterattacked in a raid led by Aglaii Soulay, Mistress of the Tower of Clarsaya, but with disastrous consequences. Skirting the eastern edge of the Margreve, the Perunalians marched into the Cloudwall Mountains where they first ran afoul of a hungry mated pair of two-headed rocs, before blundering into a hunt being conducted by a vampire noble and his squadron of Ghost Knights. Few of the White Lions survived, although Aglaii returned alive to Perunalia.

Duchess Vasilka has ordered the border around the Margreve strengthened with additional patrols of elite archers, paladins, and priests of Perun to prevent further vampire raids.

GREATER DUCHY OF MORGAU, DORESH, AND KRAKOVAR

Symbol: Top (Doresh): a gold boar's head on a dark green field; right (Morgau): a red crown on a black field; left (Krakovar) green and silver field, divided

Ruler: King Lucan (LN male vampire fighter 9)

Provincial Rulers: Thurso Dragonson, Duke of Morgau, Master of the Black Hills, Protector of the Fane of Blood, Heir to the Twin Thrones (LE male vampire wizard 12); Lord Fandorin, Baron of Doresh, Fey Lord of the Grisal Marches (LE male vampire wizard 16); Lady Mihaela, Baroness of Doresh, Pale Lady of Fandorin (LE female vampire sorcerer 9); Princess Hristina, Protector and Duchess of Krakovar, Grand Marshall of the Ghost Knights (LE female vampire fighter 14)

Prominent Nobles: Baron Urslav, the Crawling Lord of Vallanoria, Keeper of the Red Sisters (LE male vampire rogue 8); Lord Mayor Rodyan, the Glutton of Hengksburg (LE male vampire wizard 12); Countess Urzana Dolingen of Morgau (LE female vampire wizard 13)

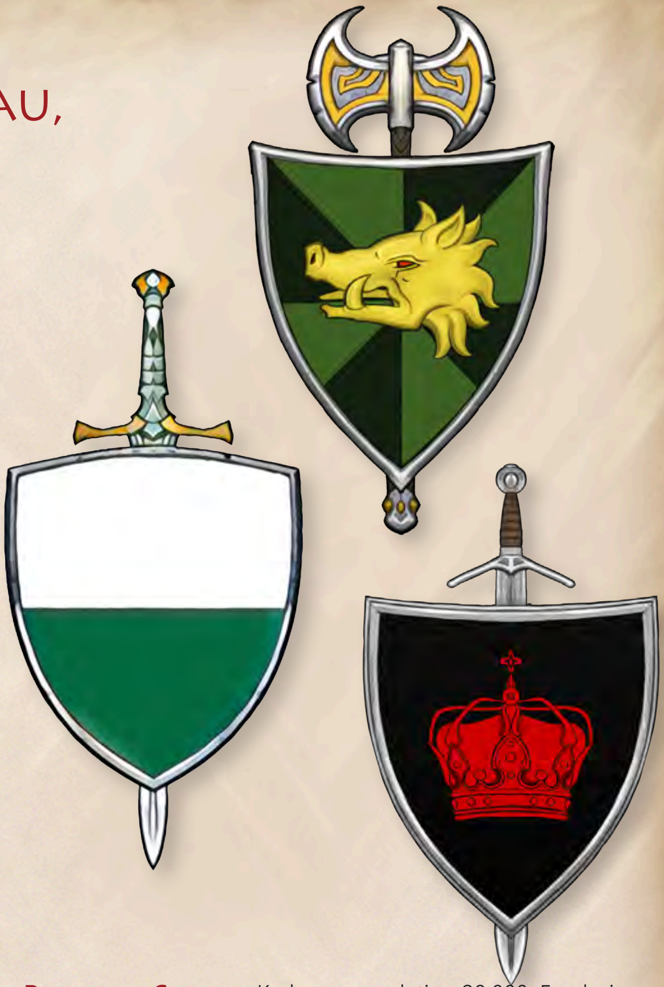
Military Commanders: Lady Darvulia, Voivodina of Cloudwall, Keeper of the Gate Subterranean (LE female vampire fighter 13); Commander Orkov of the Ghost Knights (LE female ghost knight fighter 10); Commander Baleneus of the Ghost Knights (LE male vampire fighter 11)

Blood Sisters: High Priestess Lileshka of the Chalice (LE female human cleric 15 [Marena]); Mother Abbess Calle of the Cradle, Daughter of Marena's Brood (LE female human cleric 13 [Marena]); Blood Priestess Sonye of the Spear (LE female human cleric 10 [Marena]); Sister Alkava (LE female human cleric 7 [Marena])

Important Personages: Gospodar Xanthus the Flenser (CE male human); Zrobaishalil (CE female ancient white dragon); The Dark Host or Blood Lord (CE male umbral vampire)

Population: 4,356,000 (3,990,000 humans, 35,000 skeletons, 10,000 darakhul, 9,000 ghouls, 2,800 vampires [shroud-eaters], 1,500 other undead, 1,000 dwarves; 3,000 ogres, 2,700 centaurs, 10 dragons)

Imperial Capital: Bratislor, population 9,900



Provincial Capitals: Krakova, population 28,000; Fandorin Keep

Cities: Varshava, population 31,000; Gybick, population 19,000; Hengksburg, population 12,800; Lodezig, population 8,000; Wallenbirg, population 7,000; Vallanoria, population 6,700

Castles: Bratis, Bruvik, Engerstal, Langrone, Lengrove, Valach, Verdant Tower, Heiderbirg, Tannenbirg, Yarosbirg (ruined)

Major Temples: Cantri Abbey, Temple of Aprostala, Temple of the Scourging Goddess, Blood Cathedral of Marena (under construction)

Great Gods: Marena, Mavros, Vardesain, St. Charon (Charun), the Hunter, Chernobog; in Krakovar: Marena, Vardesain, Perun, Svarog (Volund), Yarila and Porevit

Trade Goods: Necromantic goods, lumber (pine, oak, maple, beech, yew), pelts, requiem and other drugs, platinum, tin, amber, horses, wool, apples, honey

Silent War with Baba Yaga

Relationships between the vampires and Grandmother Baba Yaga have always been complex. Generally speaking they do not get along, but from time to time she has aided the shroud-eaters, though her reasons for doing so have never been clear. Thirty years ago, she warned Prince Lucan about the threat the rebellious cleric Kjord presented to his rule, prompting the prince to crush his foe and thus cement his hold on Morgau. Each year the witch is invited to celebrate the Winter Solstice in Bratislor with the Elders of Morgau and Doresh; each year she sends her apologies. Baba Yaga's hut can sometimes be seen wandering the valleys of the Cloudwall Mountains, but by and large she prefers to stay away from the Blood Kingdom.

Recent events, however, conspire to upset this fragile peace. The establishment of the Greater Duchy of Morgau has led to increased trade and a tentative alliance with the diabolic gnomes of Niemheim, hated foes of Baba Yaga. King Redbeard is looking for strong allies against the witch and is willing to trade gnomish illusion magic with the vampires.

Meanwhile, Queen Urzula of Krakova and her court-in-exile are eager to align themselves with Grandmother against the undead. The queen has dispatched several of her "mice" to search for the witch's Dancing Hut and make contact with her. So far, nearly all have returned empty-handed; one has not returned at all.

LAY OF THE LAND

A hungry crow pecks at the eyes of the rotting corpse hanging on a rusty gibbet at the crossroads. The night air is filled with the howling of wolves, the soft hooting of owls, and the occasional human scream.

The Blood Kingdom of Morgau is made up of three former kingdoms: the Duchy of Morgau, the Barony of Doresh, and the newly conquered northern province of Krakovar.

Morgau and Doresh are located on a forested highland known as the Brom Plateau, which lies between the Ironcrags to the west and the Cloudwall Mountains to the east. To the south stands the dense and ancient Margreve Forest; the vast Rothenian Plain extends as far as the eye can see to the east beyond the Cloudwalls. The fast-flowing and icy River Runnel divides Doresh on the western side of the plateau from Morgau to the east before heading north and east into Krakovar and meeting the sea at Lodezig. Too narrow for boat traffic, the river teems with trout and perch. The lands of the principalities are richly fertile—although the fields are small, they yield abundant crops, the vineyards produce excellent red wines, and the woods are full of deer and boar, providing plentiful hunting. Throughout both Morgau and Doresh, the misty landscape is dotted with small villages, crumbling ruins, and the keeps and manors of the vampiric nobility.

Bordered to the west by the Tomierran Forest, the province of Krakovar is less mountainous than Morgau and Doresh, but its central and southern parts are still hilly and rugged. The wide Yoshtula River flows through the middle of the kingdom, connecting two of its major cities—Gybick and Varshava—and meanders across the plains before emptying into the Nieder Straits near the capital city of Krakova. The northern coast can be wild and the weather stormy, but Krakova is still the most important trading hub on the straits, even after falling under vampire rule.

Bratislor

Situated in the shadow of the towering Heartspire on the main road to the east, close to the junction with the Great Northern Road, Bratislor is the capital of both the Duchy of Morgau and the whole Blood Kingdom. Surrounded by the most fertile fields and pastures in central Morgau, the city's coat of arms depicts a black castle atop a gold crown on a purple field, with a silver crescent moon above its battlements.

Bratislor is a grim city of gray walls, dominated by the imposing edifice of Bratis Castle perched atop a crag in the center of the city. Home to King Lucan, the castle is entirely the domain of the undead; no living knights or servants are permitted within. Skeletons serve the keep and a company of darakhul and imperial ghouls guards its walls. The king holds court at the castle at the Summer and Winter Solstices and all the elders and their spawn are expected to present themselves. On some occasions Koschei the Deathless attends, always with a different young woman on his arm. Their looks of shocked terror amuse King Lucan no end.

These festivals are a time of fear for the mortals of Bratislor; each solstice 100 living citizens are invited to attend the King's Feast. Afterward, only one "lucky" individual returns to the city's cobbled streets, his or her eyes and tongue gouged out and mind shattered by having heard the words of the elders and their plans for the realm for the coming season.

The Duke of Morgau—Thurso Dragonson, Master of the Black Hills, Protector of the Fane of the Blood—governs one-third of the Blood Kingdom on behalf of King Lucan and lives in considerable luxury in the city's Heartspire Palace. Nominally heir to the throne of the kingdom, Duke Thurso's hold on power is precarious—he depends on both the support of his barons and the king's favor. He lives in alternating fear and arrogance, depending on his degree of confidence at any given time. Five years ago, the scheming Countess Urzana Dolingen attempted to topple him in a coup, fleeing to the Ironcrags when it failed. Now back in favor with King Lucan after brokering the pact with the Ghoul Imperium, the countess has her sights set on the duchy again and has begun a whisper campaign against Dragonson.

Duke Thurso is not one to ignore these attempts to undermine his position, and he relies on the support of his sister, Princess Hristina, at court. She has taken on the

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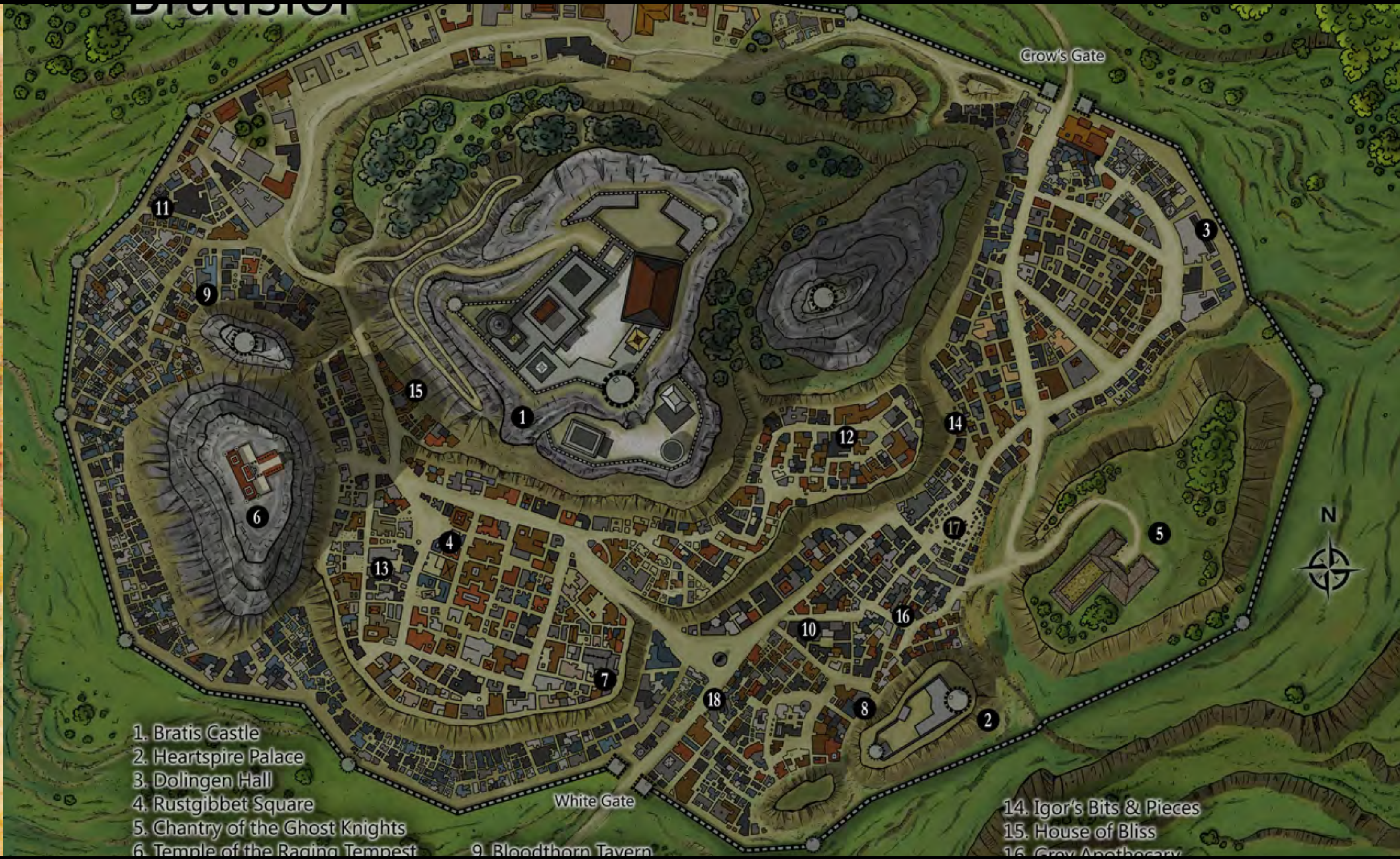

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very much in the ascendant. Some believe she wishes to claim the mantle of heir for herself, but none whisper this anywhere near Duke Thurso.

Many famed poets live in the city, and bards often visit during the Poet's Festival in the spring held at the duke's behest. Thurso is an enthusiastic patron of the arts and has been known to shower talented artists and performers with gold and silver. A select few who particularly impressed him have even been rewarded with the gift of eternal life and subsequent entry into the vampiric ruling class. However, a grisly fate awaits those who displease the duke with crude doggerel or biting satire: impaled on stakes at Poet's Corner, their screams often last until sunrise.

Hengksburg

Hengksburg is the most stable and secure city in the Greater Duchy. It thrives on the vile trade in flesh and blood, buying captives seized in raids and selling them at

to the north and the borders with Morgau's enemies, the main trade center of the realm is always bustling and free of major disruptions. Trade must flow, tolls must be paid, and most of that profit winds up here.

Unsurprisingly, the cult of Mammon has a visible presence here, though without a temple to call its own. While the archdevil's priests are free to walk the streets openly as long as they make their obeisance to the lord mayor, Hengksburg's richest merchants, grown fat on the profits of the flesh trade, keep a low profile, disguising their wealth and eschewing ostentatious clothes for fear of the city's remorseless tax collectors.

Hengksburg is ruled by Lord Mayor Rodyan, a corpulent shroud-eater who demands a toll in blood from every visiting merchant, from each serf on his land, and even from the lesser nobles who serve him. The Glutton's appetite for gold and blood is exceeded only by his need for sexual release. To date, Rodyan has been married more than 300 times—some of his wives lacked the constitution to survive even a single night of Rodyan's amorous advances—and the teenaged peasantry fear little more than to be selected.

For over a year, the common folk were spared Rodyan's attention when the mayor married Aliessa, a formidable woman who outlasted the previous hundred or so wives and was given the whispered nickname of Death's Whore by the fearful serfs. Inevitably, Rodyan tired of her too, going through 20 wives in rapid succession after her downfall before deciding his next spouse should be one of Perun's daughters. He eagerly awaits the delivery of his new "amazon bride."

When he's not indulging his foul appetites for blood and sex, the lord mayor likes to spend time nurturing the necrotic ticks he is breeding in the laboratory beneath his mansion. He uses them to create zombies to fight in the gladiatorial arena close to the city's central Hangman's Square. Unconfirmed rumors state that Rodyan's many past wives still live in the mansion's dungeon as vampiric thralls or drooling experimental subjects; others may haunt its corridors as ghosts or specters.

VALLANORIA

This military city is small but well organized. The Order of Grey Knights has a great commandery here, and the Temple of the Scourging Goddess is a center of the more warlike and flagellant priestesses of the Red Goddess. Vallanoria always retained close ties to Krakova to the north, and its citizens have never been as subdued and pliant as most of the living serfs of Morgau. However, the conquest of Krakova by the undead armies of the principalities dealt a terrible blow to those who one day hoped to be liberated from their vampiric oppressors. Several past revolts were brutally quashed, and as a result no one speaks of rebellion in Vallanoria these days, except among trusted friends. The baron has spies everywhere. Some think the crows all serve as his informants; others say the standing offer of 1,000 gp for the arrest of any rebel does his work for him.

The city's ruler is Baron Urslav, the Crawling Lord of Vallanoria, the Keeper of the Red Sisters. Urslav once made the grave mistake of offending Grandmother Baba Yaga, and she responded by removing all his bones with her magic. As a result he spent a few weeks crawling on the floor of his palace before the terrible curse wore off, and the nickname stuck. He hates the nickname and despises Baba Yaga, spending much of his time plotting his revenge. To that end, he has become a champion of the Red Goddess Marena, giving generous endowments to her abbeys and paying for the construction of new temples. Each year at her festivals he brings both animals and serfs to her altars as sacrifices.

The beautiful palace of Vallanow serves as the venue for the elders to celebrate Ghost Night and the start of winter in the presence of King Lucan and other dignitaries. The invitations to this debauch are highly sought after, at least by the undead. The stench of slaughter and decay brought to the palace by its guests makes the living nauseous for days. The festivities are organized and led now by Xanthus the Flenser, a high priest of Chernobog whose fondness for blood sacrifices at dawn is well known.

The Ghost Night Ball is usually followed by a brutal round of executions, after the common folk attempt to rise against their masters. Each year, they would pray for a Krakovan army to arrive with the spring, but it never came. It certainly won't now, though the most desperate still pin their hopes on a dwarven reaver army.

TEMPLE OF THE SCOURGING GODDESS

This formidable spike-encrusted building is part temple and part fortress. Dedicated to the Red Goddess Marena and her husband Mavros, God of War and Thunder, this is a place of iron doors and iron women. Blood Priestess Sonye of the Spear, Wife to Slaughter, serves as the temple's high priestess and leader of the warrior-priests of both deities. Sonye is second only to Lileshka of the Chalice and considers herself the likely heir to the high priestess's title. Wild-eyed with flame-red hair, she is a shrewd tactician and an exceptional warrior who led her mayhem-loving flock to bloody victory in Krakova alongside the Ghost Knights of Morgau. The crows and ghouls feasted well that season.

The Temple of the Scourging Goddess honors Marena's cult as an engine of mass slaughter; the lusts of soldiers are lusts for death and mayhem. Whetstones grind edges sharp in the outer portico, spears and swords are blessed by the priests of Mavros, and practice bouts in the courtyard often spill over to involve spectators and pilgrims. Those unfortunate enough to fall in these encounters are displayed skewered on the rusty iron spikes over the main gates. Sonye believes the slow drip-drip-drip of their blood pleases the Red Goddess. She and her temple are best avoided.

WENDESTAL FOREST AND THE STALE WOOD

Located in eastern Morgau, north of the Heartspire Road and west of the Cloudwall Mountains, Wendestal Forest is a dense greenwood composed of beech, pine, maple, and oak trees. Home to great numbers of wolves, boar, and deer, the forest provides good hunting for the local peasants and their vampire masters. The forest is under the jurisdiction of Lady Chesmaya, Voivodina of the Verdant Tower, a lich and powerful sorceress. Lady Chesmaya is a capricious ally, changing her allegiance to the other elders almost as often as she changes her robes. It is whispered she is a daughter of Baba Yaga's, or her apprentice, or both.

Beyond the well-trodden game trails and the Verdant Tower, hidden deep in the forest, is the Stale Wood. Unlike the healthy woodland surrounding it, the Stale Wood is dense and dark—no sunlight pierces through the foliage, and the air is always cold. Sinister standing stones dot the landscape, strange, sickly yellow fungi cling to the trees, and hags, cockatrices, selang, and worse lurk among the tall pines. This is the realm of the King in Rags, a bastard son of the Moonlit King of the Shadow Fey.

The King in Rags is a huge satyr, over 8 feet tall with glowing red eyes, clad in a cloak of living crows and bearing a massive axe. His helmet is topped with the rack of a great stag, and he rides a giant ram known as the Bearer of Ills. His mere presence corrupts the land, causing plants to wither and foul fungi to spread. His daughters are feral drunks, quick to lash out angrily at any who rebuff their leering advances.

For five generations, the king has married the firstborn daughter of the Lord Mallow of Twine on her 16th birthday, fulfilling an age-old pact. Twine is a decrepit small town in the Scolwingmire on the River Runnel; the current Lord Mallow hopes to spare his beloved daughter Celandine the same fate as her ancestors. He is not especially confident of success.

CLOUDWALL MOUNTAINS

On the eastern upper reaches of Morgau lie the Cloudwall Mountains. The sharp, tall mountain peaks remain snow-covered throughout the year, and their runoff gives impetus to the River Runnel. At the base of the mountains stands Cantri Abbey, home to the Blood Sisters of Marena.

Overrun with Cloudwall leopards, two-headed Krakovan eagles, ogres, and yeti, the Cloudwall Mountains serve as the private hunting grounds of the King of the Blood Kingdom and his vampire coterie. Every living creature found there—including humans and dwarves—is subject to death by a variety of blood sports, from being hunted by two-headed rocs to the night hunts of ghost knights and their vampiric masters. Criminals are sometimes sentenced to exile in the Cloudwalls. Those who survive their trip over to the Rothenian Plain are granted their lives and freedom, but few ever make it that far.

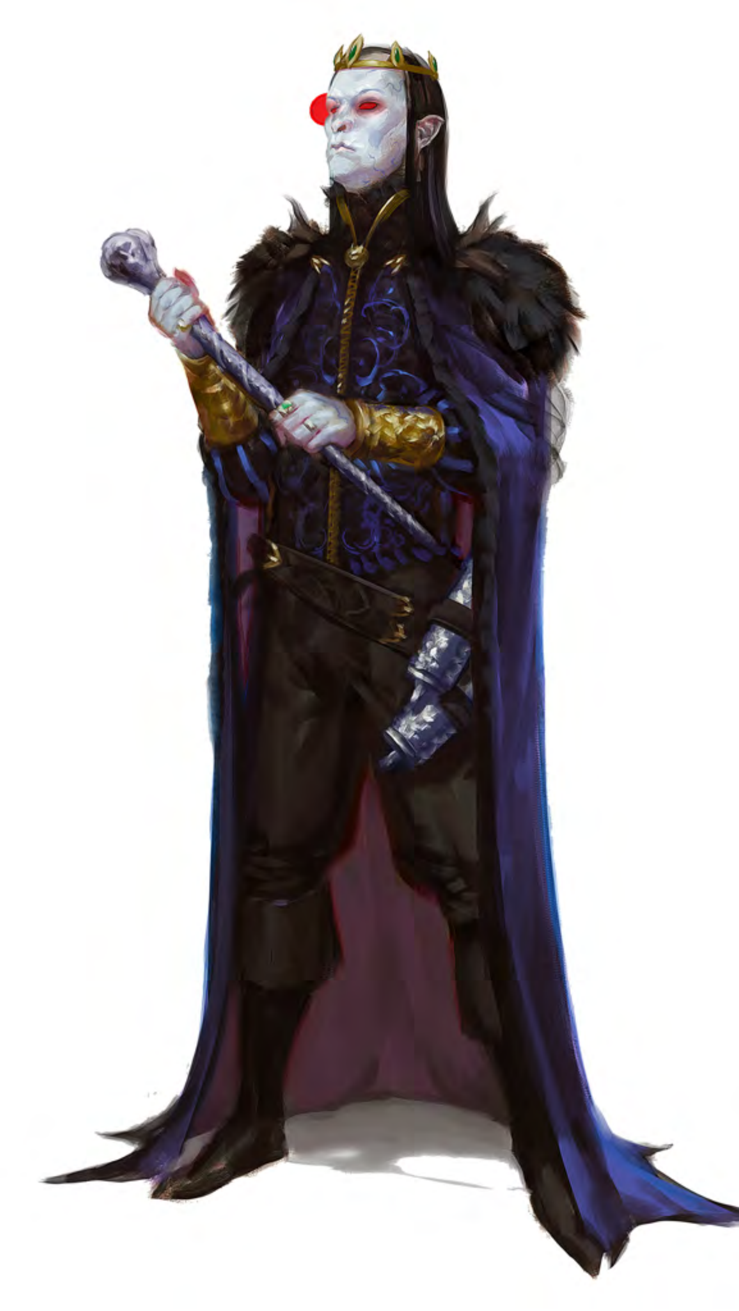
THE GHOUL IMPERIUM

Deep under the earth, stretching from below the Ironcrags, under Margreve Forest, and as far north as southern Krakova lies a dark empire: the Ghoul Imperium, home to flesh-eating and blasphem worshippers of the gods of death, hunger, and darkness, who com to the surface only to feed. Their empire rose more than 100 years with the first darakhul to answer a diabolist's summons. Today, Er Nicoforus the Pale rules the lightless tunnels and vast chambers o Imperium from his palace in the center of Darakhan, the White C

Well hidden, the empire has bided its time, growing in strength knowledge, and in numbers. Speed and ferocity carried the darak first conquests. Cunning magic and ruthless rage have kept their together. Their emperor's plan and his followers' unwavering loya the empire ever forward.

The ghoul reign of conquest against dark elves, dwarves, svirfn creepers, and other races of the underworld has not been an accid ghouls paralyze their foes, turning enemies into food or into repl for their losses. Their armies include crawling bone colossi, demo rams, bat-winged devices trailing fire and smoke, burning skeleto liquid zombies, and tunneling undead purple worms. Ghouls are soldiers, and they strike quickly: the lightly armored ghoul legior 72 miles per day in small tunnels (and don't rest by night) while th armored legions still manage 48 miles per day through difficult tu either carry their provisions or march alongside them, when the p take the form of zombies. In frenzies, ghouls can strip a battlefiel down to cracking the bones of the fallen.

The only thing that had prevented the darakhul from swarming surface world in the past was an aversion to sunlight. When Nico and his Council of the Darakhul forged their alliance with Prince Lucan, such fears were set aside as the ghoulish legions marched into Krakova as part of the undead armies that laid waste to the



Other dangers prevail in this territory as well. An ancient white female dragon known as Zrobaishalil and her yeti entourage reside on the tallest mountain and hunt the Cloudwall region. Dozens of ogre tribes war with one another and take wanderers as slaves and mates. An elder shroud-eater known only as the Dark Host or Blood Lord makes his home in the Cloudwalls. And Baba Yaga's hut sometimes wanders the valleys below, gathering goats and boiling visitors in her cauldron.

CASTLE LENGROVE AND THE GREAT NECROPOLIS

Lady Darvulia, the Voivodina of Cloudwall and Keeper of the Gate Subterranean, holds command of the mountains under authority from King Lucan. Silent and unshakeable, Lady Darvulia maintains closer ties with the Lords Subterranean of the Ghoul Imperium than any other shroud-eater. Leander Stross, the darakhul ambassador to Morgau, and Duke Drago Blackfly, ruler of the near-surface trade town of Fretlock, are both regular visitors to her court, and she employs ghoul mercenaries against her rivals.

Lady Darvulia's fortress, Castle Lengrove, stands guard over the Great Necropolis, a sprawling series of ancient tombs built into the mountainside to house the remains of members of the noble families of Morgau in the years before the duchy fell to Lucan's machinations. The sepulchers and vaults have long since been emptied of their original contents, but the inhabitants of the mountains still use them to inter their dead.

A network of catacombs inhabited by ghouls, darakhul, and dissimortuum riddles the earth beneath the necropolis. One of the larger tunnels serves as the main entrance to the Ghoul Imperium, leading to Fretlock. Most nights, a sinister market gathers among the tombs in which strange derro corpses, necromantic supplies, and rare fungal goods from the realms below are traded for blood, flesh, and slaves from the surface. Following the recent alliance between the Blood Kingdom and the ghouls, business is booming.

CANTRI ABBEY

Resting in the foothills of the Cloudwalls, Cantri Abbey, also known as the Home Abbey of the Red Sisters, watches over pregnant women in the name of the Red Goddess Marena. Expectant mothers who are having a difficult pregnancy or are predicted to have complications with childbirth make a pilgrimage here to place themselves under the care of the Mother Abbess Calle of the Cradle, Daughter of Marena's Brood. Calle and her priestesses look after these women in the wing of the abbey known as the Cradle, making sure no harm comes to them before, during, or after the birth. A stout, matronly figure with a forbidding stare, the mother abbess is invariably brusque with her underlings, but seems to enjoy making the odd quip—often somewhat unsettling in nature—to the women she looks after. Although she does her job well, Calle holds no genuine warmth toward either the mothers or their unborn babies. Instead, she sees the infants as mere consequences of lust kindled by the Red Goddess, destined to become cattle for Marena's true chosen, the vampire lords of the Blood Kingdom.

Men are forbidden from entering the walls of the abbey on pain of death. Trespassers are dealt with ruthlessly by the mother abbess—their drained corpses are hung in gibbets from the gatehouse as a warning to others. Occasionally, a vampire's charred cadaver can be spotted in one of the cages. No men means no men.

King Lucan has assigned the abbey's protection to Commander Baleneus, a powerful leader of the Ghost Knights. The Blood Sisters have yet to call upon him for aid, however. The mother abbess and her priestesses are more than capable of looking after themselves.

COMMANDERY OF LOST SOULS

The ruins of a temple and commandery post of Khors lies at the base of the Cloudwall Mountains on the northwestern side. The Order of the Knights Incorporeal include a cavalier group of Ghost Knights among their ranks, but those bear no resemblance to the ghost knights and paladins who march out of the commandery and into the mountains on full-moon nights. No records detail what caused the commandery's fall. Cloudwall's residents keep a safe distance from the ruins, parts of which have remained entirely intact.

GRISAL MARCHES

The western lands of the Barony of Doresh, bordering the Ironcrag Mountains, are known as the Grisal Marches due to their proximity to the dwarven canton of that name. The Marches are dominated by the dense forest known to Doreshi as Walkers' Wood, and to the Ironcrag dwarves as the Zombie Wood of Zwargau. Either way, the forest is aptly named: zombies and skeletons wander freely within its borders, animated by necromancers in the service of Lord Fandorin, Baron of Doresh and Fey Lord of the Grisal Marches.

The forest's western edges rise up into the hills and easternmost reaches of the mountains. These are held by the dwarves of Grisal, the Black Canton, who hate the undead and conduct frequent raids over the border to harass and destroy the Blood Kingdom's soldiers. Baron Fandorin does his best to keep the raiders at bay, but he has too few troops to hold the mountains, and the dwarves remain too cautious to push far into the forest, lest their own fallen paladins and priests line up against them later as black-armored undead. The resulting stalemate has continued for generations, so the Grisal Marches are constantly on a war footing.

Baron Fandorin is the only vampire of non-human origin among the shroud-eaters who governs lands of the Greater Duchy in King Lucan's name. Once a shadow fey, his face and body are so shriveled and shrunken that it is almost impossible to make out his elven origins, although he still follows the Queen of Night and Magic. Fandorin has ruled the Barony of Doresh and safeguarded its borders for three centuries, ever since Lucan disposed of Doresh's former ruler. He divides his time between Fandorin Keep and his underground sanctum, Whispergloom, located beneath Walkers' Wood.

Here, he has enslaved a number of Grisal dwarves, forcing them to manufacture dozens of fellforged into which the baron is intending to bind wraith-like deathwisps. With these formidable clockwork warriors in his army, Fandorin is hoping to break the long-running deadlock on the western front. The necrophagi of the Ghoul Imperium are regular visitors to the baron's dungeon lair—a secret tunnel leads directly from there to the lands of the empire. These darakhul study the arcane knowledge gathered in Fandorin's impressive library in exchange for their recommendations for foul new necromantic experiments.

Fandorin Keep

The seat of the Baron of Doresh is situated high in the foothills of the Ironcrags, overlooking the Runnel Valley below, with the boundary of Walkers' Wood visible in the distance through the omnipresent fog. The castle is a beautiful yet foreboding building with a tall, imposing central keep and towers topped with fairy-tale spires on each corner. The northwest tower, known as the Scholar's Tower, contains an ancient portal leading to the famous Stross Library in Castle Shadowcrag, but alas, the ritual to open it has long been lost. To enter the castle, visitors must cross a narrow, 500-foot-long stone bridge above the icy, fast-flowing river nearly 200 feet below.

Baron Fandorin lives in the keep with his wife, Baroness Mihaela, also once a Scáthesidhe (shadow fey). Pale and beautiful with the large ears and wide mouth of her people, she gets very bored when her husband is away working in his laboratory for days at a time. Lady Mihaela enjoys the company of strapping, red-blooded young men and likes to have a fresh one sent up to the castle from the local villages for her amusement whenever she is home alone.

Temple of Aprostala

This great Temple of the Red Goddess stands at the eastern edge of Walkers' Wood on the road between Bratislor and Hengksburg. Built from blood-red stone, the shrine of Aprostala is a site of pilgrimage for Marena's faithful, and a place of gory daily sacrifices—pure white goats or calves are favored. Here, the dead serve the living: skeletons act as temple guards and zombies drag away the corpses of the sacrificial victims and carry ceramic pots filled with blood from the altar.

Those who come here to pay homage are expected to display marks of devotion—shallow wounds or scars in their hands, cheeks, or shoulders. If these wounds can be reopened while kneeling at the Red Goddess's altar, so much the better. High Priestess Lileshka of the Chalice, Mother of Lust, is Marena's highest-ranking priestess and runs things at Aprostala. Sometimes the Red Goddess whispers to her, ordering her to seduce one or more of the pilgrims. Those men and women who willingly submit to her overtures are rewarded with an audience afterward to petition for the aid of the Red Goddess; those who rebuff Lileshka's advances are handed over to the fanatics of the Order of Rosy Salvation. These zealous priestesses gladly break off from self-chastisement to turn their attentions and their scourges onto the pilgrims.

Blood Vaults

The Blood Vaults of Sister Alkava are located at the top of the cliffs overlooking the village of Karvolia in the Black Hills of Morgau. Known as the Sanguine Shrine until a few months ago, the village's disused temple to Marena was recently reopened and renovated by an enthusiastic young priestess named Sister Alkava. Alkava is a necromancer who developed a new method for storing blood, so it keeps fresh for longer in specially designed "blood vaults." In the course of her work, the priestess discovered that she could siphon off power from the sacred Blood Cauldrons she uses to store the blood given by the villagers in tribute. The sister acquired a taste for this power—and the more she drew into herself, the more exhilarating it became.

The Blood Vaults are a huge edifice, built into the side of the cliffs above Karvolia. Visitors enter through a pair of massive stone doors decorated with a bas relief carving of the Red Goddess. Inside are a series of gruesome rooms, protected by Alkava's living and undead minions, where the priestess collects the villagers' blood to power her twisted necromantic experiments. In the final chamber, the Blood Cauldron Sepulcher, Sister Alkava and her fearsome blood zombies lurk amid the huge stone cauldrons overflowing with precious blood—the source of her terrifying power.

Province of Krakovar

Things are very different now in the former Electoral Kingdom of Krakova. The surviving members of the royal family are in exile in Dornig, reaver dwarves from Wolfheim have seized the peninsula to the northwest of Krakova and the city of Jozht, and the rest of the country is under vampire rule.

Princess Hristina, Grand Marshall of the Ghost Knights, rules the newly formed Province of Krakovar as its Protector from its capital Krakova, the City of the Mermaid. The Slahta, the thousands of landholding nobles who used to elect the king and make the laws of the land, have been forced to tow the protector's line following a series of bloody executions of those who proved recalcitrant. They still administer much of the government of the province, but their power has been hobbled. Princess Hristina abolished the annual Gathering of Envoys where new laws were promulgated, and had the most senior members of the Slahta—the High Posol and the Magnates—killed for treason against the crown.

Throughout the land, Wotan's temples were razed, and the priestesses of the Red Goddess established new shrines to Marena in the cities and towns while Perun's places of worship were rededicated as temples to his mask as Mavros. New commanderies of the Ghost Knights have been established at Heiderbirg and at Tannenbirg, rebuilt following its destruction in the conquest.

Despite all this, the vampires' hold on Krakovar is tenuous. The undead were able to conquer the kingdom by launching an aggressive blitzkrieg spearheaded by the Ghost Knights and fearsome darakhul troops. Now, they find themselves in day-to-day control of a province with a population more than seven times that of the principalities. For the time being the nobles live in fear of their new masters, but resistance is growing among the peasantry, and the eastern coast and border is still at risk from attacks by Northlanders, trolls, and Khazzaki raiders. It will prove difficult for the vampires to hold on to their territory if the reaver dwarves ally with the exiled royal family and launch a counterattack. And if Queen Urzula can win the support of Grandmother Baba Yaga, Morgau's situation will be even worse.

Krakova, City of the Mermaid

The provincial capital Krakova remains the largest trading hub of the Nieder Straits, even after falling into vampire hands. The city's docks are among the finest in the region with excellent shelter and quays for cargos. Krakova drives trade to Bjornshafen, Courlandia, Tanserhall, and as far west as Bemmea. In the past, the city's size and power worked for it: attempts by dwarves or the guilds of Vidim to dominate shipping in the straits were met with fierce reprisals and open piracy. Princess Hristina is determined to keep trade flowing and has put General at Arms (now Admiral) Ungur, the highest-ranking living officer in the Ghost Knights, in charge of the navy. The province's merchant fleet must remain ever vigilant against attack from the reaver dwarves based at Skogarholm and Jozht.

The city is built on dozens of harbor islands connected by bridges. The largest of them is Mermaid's Island, more than a mile long, where the first kings and queens of Krakova were crowned and where the Slahta used to meet to elect new kings. Mermaid's Island and its Golden Fields, where the nobility would gather during the envoy season, are now off-limits by order of the protector. The impressive Assembly Hall of the Magnates has begun to fall into disrepair, but the council chamber is being used as a secret meeting place by supporters of the queen-in-exile who lead the resistance to vampire rule.

Princess Hristina recently reinstated Krakova's Winter Ball to be held at the royal Breesek Palace. Many of the nobles of the Slahta are considering their invitations to the revel with a great deal of trepidation.

Varshava, City of Horses

Home to horse breeders and famous for its races, Varshava was the base of the kingdom's royal cavalry before the conquest. When the Ghost Knights approached the city after taking Yarosbirg, Prince Hardrad Walerska, heir apparent and commander of the First Hussars, gravely underestimated the enemy he faced. Instead of waiting behind the city's robust defenses and forcing the undead to attack the walls, the arrogant prince rode out at the head of the royal cavalry regiments, intending to attack at first light. Grand Marshall Hristina did not wait that long—the Ghost Knights and warrior-priests of Mavros smashed through the column of hussars over and over again in the darkness, panicking the Krakovan horses and sending the army into disarray. Some made it back into the city. Most, including the hapless prince, were slaughtered. Varshava surrendered the next day.

Following the city's capture, Varshava's celebrated World Tree Temple to Wotan was razed to the ground by the darakhul. In its flames, many saw visions of Ragnarok. The smoke hung heavy over the city for a month, and the smoldering ashes are said to have been imbued with great magical power, stirring the ley lines and sparking magical gifts in some of those who breathed its vapors. The priestesses of the Red Goddess have begun construction of a huge Blood Cathedral to Marena on the site, which will dwarf even the Temple of Aprostala.

Gybick, City of Scribes

Gybick thrives on its book trade and its excellence in accountancy. Before the invasion, the city was also the center of the Krakovan "mice," the covert spy network of priests of Loki and Wotan who maintained careful watch over the kingdom, looking for signs of diabolism or vampirism and carrying out secret instructions on behalf of the king. Its libraries and its counting houses have both been looted, but the undead took mainly lavish, ostentatious volumes as plunder; the mice kept their most valuable information in plain calfskin folios.

When the city fell, the chief spymaster, Velda Lupei, burned the organization's records to prevent them falling into vampire hands. However, she hid a few precious volumes in an extradimensional space, detailing information about the most senior spies, especially those who might lead a rebellion. Whether Velda has the stomach or ability to use those hidden agents against Morgau remains to be seen. Secretly, she plans to run to Dornig or Jozht as soon as the roads seem safer.

Lodezig, City of Amber

Wealthy and somewhat isolated from the rest of the kingdom, Lodezig controls the inland waterway of the River Runnel leading up to the Cloudwall Mountains, and its citizens fear the dragons, rocs, and ogres living in that wild range of peaks. The city is built on an island in the river mouth, with a silty and dangerous harbor. Lodezig has grown in importance now that trade with the gnomes of Niemheim is on the increase; the city also sells amber to the Northlanders.

WALLENBIRG, CITY OF PINES

Known for its carved and colorful wooden toys, the skill of its archers, and the dangers of its forests, Wallenbirg is Krakova's nearest city to the Tomierran forest. Timber and charcoal make up much of its trade, but it is also the seat of the former royal hunting lodge and the jumping-off point for expeditions to the ruins of Thorn. Wallenbirg's walls fell to a deadly assault by the darakhul during the undead invasion—the ghouls poured over the battlements in great numbers to slaughter the city's defenders.

The shroud-eaters always enjoy hunting and Count Warin, the vampire lord who now rules the city, makes good use of the woodlands, hunting human peasants and fey alike. The creatures of the woods don't take too kindly to this: the count's men disappear and the city is sometimes subject to fey revenges, leading to citywide distress when children vanish or swarms of mice strip the granaries bare.

HEIDERBIRG CASTLE

This formidable castle built of bricks, at the mouth of the Yoshtula River, defends the entire river system against northern reavers, who come primarily in longships and sometimes carracks, both capable of navigating 50 miles or more up the river if unopposed. Previously the Krakovan headquarters of the Order of the Storm, Heiderbirg is now a commandery for the Order of the Knights Incorporeal under the authority of Commander Ciobanu, newly promoted by Grand Marshall Hristina for his valor and tactical nous on the battlefield.

Some of the more bloodthirsty knights of the Order of the Storm returned to the castle after swearing allegiance to Mavros and Blood Priestess Sonye of the Spear—the fledgling Order of the Bloody Blade also falls under Ciobanu's command. Survivors who remained loyal to Perun fled northwest to join the reaver dwarves at Jozht.

TANNENBIRG CASTLE

The great forest castle of Tannenbirg fell to the darakhul army on the first night of the invasion. The ghouls entered the castle through a hidden tunnel known to the undead through the double agents they had placed within Krakova's spy network. A night of terrible slaughter followed, ending with the castle being burned to the ground. Since the conquest, Princess Hristina had the fortress rebuilt to ensure that the province's western border with the Grand Duchy of Dornig is properly defended.

YAROSBIRG CASTLE

Now in ruins, Yarosbirg was the third great castle of Krakova, home to both the Order of the Spear (devoted to Sif) and a monastery dedicated to light, faith, and the destruction of the undead. Yarosbirg was taken by the Ghost Knights and the warrior-priests of Mavros on the same night Tannenbirg fell to the darakhul. The paladins and clerics of Sif fought bravely against the undead, who appeared in their midst by phasing through the walls on their fell mounts.

As the vampires and ghouls began slaughtering the defenders, Sister Adelind, a shield maiden of Sif, strode forward and stabbed the notorious vampire lord Otmar the Sallow through the heart with her radiant spear, incinerating him. A pack of ghouls surrounded her, but Adelind continued to fight furiously until she was finally pulled to the ground and devoured. Her death inspired the other paladins to fight until they too were overpowered.

Those who escaped the carnage told the story of Sister Adelind wherever they went. When her tale reached the ears of Queen Urzula, she proclaimed Sister Adelind a martyr and the shield maiden has since become a symbol of hope and defiance to those who stand against the vampires. After the battle, Grand Marshall Hristina ordered Yarosbirg razed to the ground to serve as a memorial and eternal tomb for her cousin Otmar. Some of those who visit the memorial, though, leave tiny wooden spears and white flowers as offerings to Saint Adelind.

THE WOLFMARK

When the vampires of the principalities invaded the electoral kingdom, Skuti the Whelp, the youngest son of the king of Wolfheim, spotted an opportunity for glory. Skuti arrived in Krakova with several dozen longships, landing on the coast to the north of Jozht. But instead of raiding the coastal villages and returning across the Nieder Straits with their ships full of plunder, the reaver dwarves stayed, establishing a new fortified settlement at Skogarholm and offering protection to Krakovans fleeing the undead as long as they were willing to pay tribute. The dwarves hate the vampires and were all too eager to cleave their shining axes through bony undead necks.

From his new base, Skuti's holdings grew over the next few years until the whole peninsula and even the city of Jozht fell under his control, giving Princess Hristina an unpredictable threat to worry about on her western border. To make matters worse, discussions are underway between Jarl Skuti and exiled nobles loyal to Queen Urzula, proposing that the royal court-in-exile recognize the Barony of Wolfmark—in exchange for liberating more territory from the Blood Kingdom on the queen's behalf.

SKOGARHOLM

This small fortified coastal town is surrounded by a perfectly circular wall, built atop steep earthen ramparts. Four city gates face north (to the docks where the reavers' longships are moored), east, south, and west. Roads leading into the city from these four gates divide the city into quadrants; Jarl Skuti's imposing longhall stands in the center of the town where they meet. The sounds of

THE WOLFMARK

Symbol: Blue wolf's head facing left, on a red field

Ruler: Skuti the Whelp (LN male reaver dwarf fighter 10)

Population: 44,500 (37,500 humans, 7,000 reaver dwarves)

Capital: Skogarholm, population 4,300 (3,700 reaver dwarves, 600 humans)

City: Free City of Jozht, population 18,000 (15,000 humans, 3,000 reaver dwarves)

Great Gods: Thor, Volund, Wotan, Ninkash, Loki

Trade Goods: Pine, amber, wool, salted fish, apples, honey

rowdy dwarven war songs, colorful insults, and splintering bar furniture pour forth from the mead halls to fill the air from dusk until late into the night.

FREE CITY OF JOZHT

Jozht, City of Fish, was once a somewhat ordinary fishing town with a carefully maintained harbor, earthen city wall and brick towers, and a hardened garrison accustomed to raids from the North. When the undead invaded, its inhabitants decided to seek aid from the dwarves at Skogarholm, promising to rise up in support of a reaver attack. Being called a liberator as well as a bold conqueror appealed to Skuti the Whelp's ego, so he sent 3,000 of his reaver dwarves south to seize control of Jozht, declaring it a "free city" under the Wolfmark's aegis.

Jozht remains a wealthy fishing town, and it exports cartloads of salted fish and herring to the inland regions—though its trade is now primarily directed to Courlandia and the Duchy of Dornig rather than Morgau. The huge volume is such that it must import salt from Salzbach to meet demand. Keeping the salt route open is vital to the city's ongoing prosperity.

QUEEN URZULA AND THE ROYAL COURT-IN-EXILE

When the City of the Mermaid fell to Grand Marshall Hristina's undead army, the beloved wife of King Eynryk, Queen Urzula, fled the capital along with several key members of the royal family and her court. These included her eldest daughter Zosia Walerska, a respected priestess of Wotan, and the king's brother Archduke Avgost, who commands great loyalty among the Slahta.

Queen Urzula has always been seen as a saintly figure, inspiring women to strive for greatness as archers, priestesses, wives, and mothers. Some believe that the queen's upbringing in a Perunalian finishing school influenced her advocacy for a greater role for female nobles and female scholars in Krakova.

The queen and her court escaped to the Grand Duchy of Dornig. Urzula is pursuing many different angles to save her people from the shroud-eaters. Her representatives are bargaining with the reaver dwarves of the Wolfmark, offering to recognize their rights to the northern peninsula in exchange for military aid. At the same time, the queen's loyal spies and agents (members of the "mice") offer advice, practical support, and weapons to those in the province who are prepared to rise up against their new rulers. For a time, Urzula hoped to meet with the Beloved Imperatrix to win her support against the Blood Kingdom, and it broke her heart when word came of the Imperatrix's mysterious coma and the mustering of war bands in Dornig.

As an even more desperate hope, Urzula has dispatched operatives to track down Baba Yaga in the hopes that Grandmother might ally with her against Morgau. So far, the first two approaches seem more promising.

NINE CITIES OF NIEMHEIM

Some creatures of Midgard are gentle, loving, and brave. The gnomes of Niemheim are none of these things. They are servants of hell.

They were not always so. The gnomes lived among the people of Krakova for many years as friends and allies, teaching humans the arts of fey sorcery, weaving, and gardening. They were a kindly people, eager to discuss the finer points of pottery, alchemy, tanning, and the illumination of manuscripts. Their hats and noses were sources of mirth, but their wisdom was valued and respected.

Then, 200 years ago, a gnome prince betrayed a promise made to Baba Yaga. A blood oath of loyalty and service was foresworn. The prince died swiftly, but his people's suffering was slow.

Ever since, it is said, Baba Yaga sought to use their beards for her pillow-stuffing. The gnomes suffered attacks by night-haunts, strigoi, the ala hags, and the psoglav demon-dogs—all servants of Baba Yaga. The gnomes lived in perpetual pants-wetting terror, knowing their children would be grist for Baba Yaga's mortar, and their villages kindling for her fire and her hunting drakes. Village by village, the gnomes disappeared.

Until one day, a devil of the Eleven Hells made the King of the Gnomes an offer. A very generous offer.

ADVENTURES IN THE BLOOD KINGDOM

Depending on the proclivities and alignments of your PCs, adventures in the kingdom might be focused on keeping its downtrodden inhabitants safe from hungry vampires and ghouls and the priestesses of the Red Goddess. Alternatively, much gold can be made working for the Elders and their servants, particularly in dangerous situations where the PCs side with one shroud-eater against another.

- One of the PCs gains the *Spark of Kjord* (see Appendix) after committing an act of defiance against the vampire rulers of Morgau. There is a short window of opportunity to use the *Spark* to save the innocent villagers of Sinzasna from an imminent vampire raid before word reaches the ears of King Lucan.
- Carmina, eldest daughter of the mayor of Tarcesti, a small village in the Black Hills of Morgau, was stolen away by slavers a few months ago and briefly married to Lord Rodyan, the Glutton of Hengksburg. Mayor Croitoru refuses to believe she is dead and offers all the gold he has if the PCs can find his daughter and bring her back to him.
- The lich Lady Chesmaya, Voivodina of the Verdant Tower, hires the PCs through her intermediaries (or in person, magically disguised to appear human) to sneak into Whispergloom, Baron Fandorin's secret workshops under Walkers' Wood. Once inside, they are to kidnap a dwarven engineer and steal the schematics for the fellforged he is constructing. Lady Chesmaya (see page 96) offers the PCs an audience with her grandmother Baba Yaga in return for their service.
- Alexandru Balan, a wealthy but very nervous merchant based in Hengksburg, is looking for a group of discreet adventurers to transport a valuable package to the ghoul trade city of Fretlock, deliver it to a darakhul merchant named Silas Folly, and return safely with payment. This "lucrative but simple job" involves a perilous journey through the Cloudwall Mountains, gaining entrance to the Ghoul Imperium through the catacombs of the Great Necropolis, surviving a night or two in Fretlock, and then avoiding the attention of Lord Rodyan's eagle-eyed tax collectors on return to Hengksburg.
- Queen Urzula of Krakova dispatches the PCs from her court-in-exile in Dornig to Krakovar to gauge the military strength of the undead stationed at the rebuilt Tannenbirg Castle. To gain the intelligence they need, the adventurers must join the Order of the Knights Incorporeal and advance through the ranks of the Ghost Knights as rapidly as they can, preferably without becoming undead themselves in the process.
- The inhabitants of Wallenbirg have suffered enough under vampire control and are willing to take drastic steps to overthrow their rulers. The PCs' mission is to sneak out of the city and head north to the dwarf-held city of Jozht. Here they must negotiate an agreement with the warlike dwarves, promising that the people of Wallenbirg would rise up in support of a reaver attack to seize the city for the Wolfmark, as long as its living inhabitants are not harmed.

THE DEVIL'S OFFER

The devil swore he would hide the gnomes deep in the Krakovan woods in a dozen far-flung villages. Furthermore, the demons and devils of the Eleven Hells, the erinyes and barbed and bearded devils in their many varieties, would encircle those villages as wardens against Baba Yaga. The creatures of hell would protect the entire gnome race—for a small price in blood and souls.

It says volumes about the terrors that Baba Yaga brought down upon the gnomes that they considered this a bargain worth making. In their defense, their only other choice was gradual extinction in Baba Yaga's stewpots. And so they swore themselves to hell, and they have made the best of it ever since.

THE INFERNAL GNOMES TODAY

Once a month, the gnomes make blood sacrifices. If no strangers come to their tidy little towns, they must offer one of their own. Gnome thugs and illusionists and enchanters ply the roads and taverns, amusing travelers. Some of those travelers might follow a kindly gnome to the forest or hear rumors of wealth and fame. They become curious about the silent land beneath the pine boughs. Someone always becomes curious when the gnome bards spin a tale.

Visitors to the Wormwood have grown exceedingly rare, and few intrude on the gnomes in their deep piney woods these days. The gnomes hold a dozen villages or towns east of Krakova, all well ordered, with pretty gardens and neat central squares and half-timbered houses. They work hard as tanners of calfskin and hunting leathers. Gnome wives weave clever woolens, and the gnome charcoal burners make the fuel to light the dark nights and the hottest kilns outside of the Ironcrags. Potters fight each other for bright gnome glazes, and housewives prize small kitchen knives of Niemheim steel. The gnomes produce suspiciously fine vellum in inordinate quantities, enough to fill the

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source or methods.

Recently, and with great care, the gnomes have devised several ways of leaving the Wormwood without being eaten. Their king hopes to make things right with the great crone while a cunning warlock has infused acorns and grass seeds from the forest with infernal magic—evil copses of trees are sprouting up across the plain, each expanding the gnomes' territory.

The gnomes still have enemies, but Baba Yaga's eyes are blinded in their lands. In spring, raiding Krakovan darakhul might ride in with a half-drunk Khazzaki scout and steal some sheep or a traveling tinker. But those undead and the riotous centaurs who enter Niemheim without permission vanish into the forest. Not long after, a new shipment of exceptional tallow candles, finely honed knives, and neatly repaired tunics is loaded on a dwarven mule train to Vidim or Morgau, and the gnomes grow a little richer.

The gnomes' land is defined by their fear of Baba Yaga's wrath, and its people shelter quietly and modestly among the dark forest boughs of the Wormwood. The forest is one of their defining elements; they cut lumber and export it in many forms to the Blood Kingdom and Vidim, but the trees are more valuable by far for the sense of shelter they give the gnomes. Their towns and two cities are half above the earth and half below, easily overlooked when fully covered in fey glamours. It seems as if the gnomes wish that everyone would ignore them and their woods.

This is the way of things under the dark branches of the forests of Niemheim.

King Redbeard

The king of the gnomes wants nothing more than to make peace with Baba Yaga, break the devils' shackles, and free his people from infernal salvation. He is intensely pragmatic, and though the years of diabolical influence have changed him and his subjects, the king's heart desires freedom. The arrangement keeps the gnomes safe from Baba Yaga's ire, but the price is high and unwavering. He has watched his people's cleverness turn to wickedness, wisdom to malice, and ingenuity to bloodlust.

agents, others do not. His people are divided between those who wish to live as if the bargain did not exist and those who relish its evil consequences. Redbeard does what he must to maintain the ancient pact but works in secret to break it. He tries to keep the influence of the hells at bay, but he rarely escapes the company of the cruel and sophisticated bone devil, Ambassador Xingat. The devil is a constant reminder of the sacrifices and deeds demanded by the hells to thwart the great witch's gaze.

Redbeard is tall and imposing for a gnome. His long beard curls into five flaming, finger-like points. A deep cinder-colored light emanates from his beard, and motes of ash follow him wherever he goes. His face is deeply lined and rarely does his brow unfurrow. He wears the *Wormwood Robe*, a magical garment made from living mosses and fungi. It is said the robe grants the king the power to travel through his forest home at tremendous speed. He carries a scepter made from a deer's antlers; each point of the scepter grants the king access to a powerful spell, and upon each point burns a different colored flame.

The Offering Bowl

King Redbeard has not left his people's fate to chance. He has devised and already begun work on a strategy to make peace with Baba Yaga. Deep in the heart of the Wormwood, hidden from the eyes of the people and the devilish wanderers who frolic there, the king is building salvation. In a giant underground cave guarded by loyal gnomes who reject the diabolical influence, a massive wooden bowl is being constructed. Carved from the oldest trees in the forest, the offering bowl represents the gnomes' best chance at escaping their hellish masters. With the help of one of Baba Yaga's daughters, a beautiful vila named Unera, the gnome's work is hidden from the eyes of the devils. This twice-hidden construction has only just begun, and when completed, is to be filled with the blood of innocent mortals. Redbeard is convinced this final despicable act will appease the great witch and end the ancient wrong.

The king has placed oversight of the project in the hands of Lord Dragonfetch, a spymaster and long-time friend to Redbeard. Dragonfetch keeps a close eye on the offering bowl and a closer eye on the gnomes entrusted to build it.

Redbeard's Hidden Palace

The palace is both an administrative center, for justice and courtier's pleas, and a military fortress, well guarded and warded with arcane powers against shadow magic, divination, and scrying. Redbeard's personal guard numbers more than 200 veteran wands and blades, all of whom have petitioned the throne and sworn a blood oath to serve His Majesty as the Gentleman Irregulars.

The presence of devils and hellish ambassadors in the Hidden Palace is a matter of annoyance to visitors (they speak only Infernal, and occasionally take offense at some imagined insult). Roads to the planes are common in the Hidden Palace, and the conjunction of arcane forces here is very strong.

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The influence of the Eleven Hells bends magic within the gnome's kingdom, perhaps as part of the infernal protection against Baba Yaga. All illusions cast within Niemheim are extremely potent and much more difficult to detect than usual. It is said that spellcasters have been fooled by their own illusions under the boughs of the Wormwood! The gnomes, however, are particularly resilient against illusion magic, and they

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RED CAPS AND SPROUTINGS

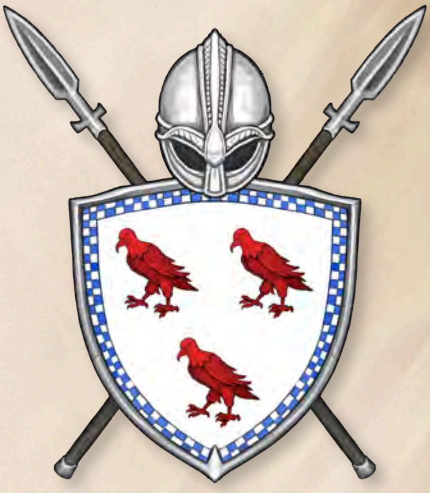
While King Redbeard plots his way to an audience with Grandmother, a cunning assembly of gnomes has invented several clever ways to safely travel beyond the Wormwood. The first strategy includes a strange hat made from bits of the forest floor. The Red Caps of Niemheim are created by growing mushrooms, small plants, and lichen native to the Wormwood on top of simple linen scarves. Once the flora is established, the cap is firmly tied under its bearer's chin. A gnome who wears one these living hats has a chance to leave the forest without drawing the attention of Grandmother's ever-watching gaze. Keeping the hat alive is the principal challenge, and the slow rate of production has meant only a handful of gnomes have successfully left the forest. The fate of the gnomes caught by Grandmother's minions is not known, but horrifying theories prevent all but the bravest from donning the Red Caps and risking travel across the plain.

The second method, far more insidious than the first, brings a new threat to the Rothenian Plain. Halivimar the Charred (CE male gnome warlock 10), a blind warlock who dwells in a hut made from skulls, outside Hexen, communed with his infernal patron during a lunar eclipse. In his meditative trip through the Eleven Hells, he had a vision of the Wormwood growing vigorously—its boundary expanding into the Wandering Realm. A devilish plan was hatched. Halivimar demanded the capture of a dozen good-hearted fey. Once the poor creatures were caged, he ground them alive in a torturous mortar and pestle. The resulting mess was dried and then used in dark rituals to quicken the growth of a few trees and shrubs. The process worked perfectly.

Now, enabled by brave Red Cap-wearing scouts called Zharadnik, the gnomes create infernal copses of trees across the Rothenian Plain. These small outposts of forested growth are referred to as "sproutings." The Zharadnik carry the quickened seeds as far as they can. Once planted, the seeds transform into a fully grown sprouting in less than a day. The average size of a sprouting is limited to around 5,000 square feet. Halivimar is working on ways to increase the size of his infernal groves, but he is limited by time and the number of available fey victims to fuel his work.

Established sproutings consist of 20 or 30 gnomes living in crudely built huts. They are avoided by the other races of the Plain, though the Khazzaki sometimes trade plunder for herbal poultices.

NIEMHEIM, THE FOREST CITIES



SYMBOL: Three red crows on a white field, with a checkered blue border

RULER: King Redbeard (LE male gnome rogue 14), King of All the Gnomes, Defender Against the Heathen, Bringer of Plenty, Lord of All Lands and Manors, Grand Marshall of the Invincible Host, Ambassador-in-Plenipotentiary to the Eleven Havens

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: Lady Twopenny, Recruiter-General (LE female gnome); Heirarch and Metropolitan of Mammon Goldpence, Keeper of Tithes (LE male human); High Priestess and Chief Whip Silberkuss, Metropolitan of Marena (LE female gnome); Sablehorns, Metropolitan of Chernobog (LE male gnome); Lord Dragonfetch, Spymaster and Keeper of Contracts (LN male gnome); Ambassador Xingat (LE bone devil)

POPULATION: 139,300 (124,000 gnomes, 13,300 humans, 1,500 dwarves, 500 centaurs)

CAPITAL: Holmgard, population 8,000 (7,750 gnomes, 150 humans, 100 dwarves)

CITIES: Hexen, population 19,000 (all gnomes); Überlauten, population 17,000 (12,000 gnomes, 5,000 humans); Königsheim, population 13,000 (11,000 gnomes, 1,100 humans, 900 dwarves); Dorograd, population 9,600 (6,000 gnomes, 3,500 humans, 100 centaurs); Janosgrod, population 7,500 (all gnomes)

TOWNS: Metropolis of Volvyagrad, population 4,800 (3,000 gnomes, 1,700 humans, 100 centaurs); Hellersbad, population 3,300 (all gnomes); Ostzig, population 3,000 (all gnomes); Osweiten, population 1,300 (1,200 gnomes, 100 dwarves)

GREAT GODS: Chernobog, Goat of the Woods, the Hunter, Mammon, Marena

TRADE GOODS: Mithral, pine, oak, beech, rosewood, woven wool, fine calfskin and leathers, amber, pear and cherry brandy, wormwood liquors

Tree of Sulf

To the delight (and horror) of the gnomes, the dreadful Tree of Sulf has grown a few miles south of the Wormwood. Its surrounding trees and mushrooms bristle with spree demons and glower stones. The gnomes have protected this particular sprouting, for at its heart, the Tree of Sulf is a corrupted World Tree: a tall and thick oak tree with sickly yellow bark, whose roots draw sustenance from the Eleven Hells. Its branches twist and spiral, its leaves grow black and crimson, and its sulfurous stench can be detected for miles. Diabolical ambassadors use it as a quick shortcut to and from their home in the hells.

The gnomes collect the smoldering acorns of the tree and extract their magic to enchant their knives and hide armor. The acorns are extremely dangerous to touch, and the gnomes must wear thick leather gloves when handling them. Some gnomish alchemists have discovered that the acorns can be cooled and fermented into a brimstone-infused liquor, which they sell for tremendous prices at the markets in Holmgard. The long-term effects of drinking these spirits is not known.

Most menacing, however, is the occasional infernal traveler who steps into Midgard from the boughs of the tree. Welcomed and worshipped, the monster either stays in the company of the gnomes or journeys to the distant Demon Mountain. The irregularity of these appearances indicates that the gateways growing in the Tree of Sulf are inconstant. Sablehorns, a high-ranking gnome cleric of Chernobog, leads the effort to stabilize the fiery portals and often travels to the tree to oversee dread rituals.

Glower Stones

Though the Wormwood offers excellent protection from their adversaries, the gnomes of Niemheim continue to invent new defenses for their forest-bound cities. Chief among these protections are the grim and malevolent glower stones. These grisly assemblages of stone, wood, bone, and viscera are set throughout the forest, but most often at the edges of their territory. One part alarm and one part deterrent, these magical unmoving constructs are the gnomes' first line of defense against invaders.

A typical glower stone consists of a ring of sharpened sticks, upon which is skewered the rotting viscera of Niemheim's enemies. The sticks surround a crude and hunching gnomish form made from stone and bone. The statue's face has the ability to magically change its expression: neutral and welcoming to those with permission to enter the forest or glowering and menacing for trespassers. The glower stones relay information back to their creators, informing the nearby communities that someone or something has entered the Wormwood. The devilish interloper Ambassador Xingat takes great pleasure in assisting in the creation of the glower stones. He considers them great works of art and takes personal interest in their preservation.

While most glower stones are merely witnesses set to intimidate interlopers, some are much more powerful. Infused with hellfire, these potent sentries unleash burning rays from their eyes and screech foul utterances in the tongue of devils. These dangerous constructs are most easily identified by the presence of animated heads atop the stakes that surround them. In place of innards and sinew, the heads of tortured victims gape and howl when the glower stone is activated. The combination of infernal fire and pleas of the gibbering damned are enough to repel even the most stalwart hero.

Great City of Holmgard

The city of Holmgard is the most human and approachable settlement of Niemheim. It was founded by Northern adventurers from among the dwarfholds long ago, and it fell into human hands for centuries before the elves came. Those days are long past, though, and the gnomes have converted its temples to the worship of their dark and fearsome gods. Over the centuries, the city has grown large enough to throw off attacks by anything less than a whole army of Northlanders. As a trading center for goods to and from the far South and even the far East, Holmgard sees travelers from distant lands as well as elves and centaurs from the Rothenian Plain. Expeditions to distant realms set out from Holmgard and Volvyagrad over the plain and past rowdy bands of Khazzaki and centaurs in search of riches on the Grass Road or in the shining desert cities of the far South. Enclaves of merchants give the city an exotic feel.

Despite this outward openness, Holmgard is the gnome capital and its Hidden Palace is, well, hidden. Gnomes who are invited to the palace receive an invitation at dawn and are expected to wander the streets until they are (somehow) conjured along a magical path to the palace. Non-gnomes who are invited require a gnome guide to find the place and are escorted out blindfolded on owlback.

Gnome Names

The gnomes take their paranoia to a certain degree in naming and introductions. They never claim to give their true names: they introduce themselves with obfuscations such as, "I am a master smith and you may call me Cinderspark." Their true names are kept among family and the closest of friends only. Even their king goes by a public name; his true name is a secret protected by his wife and daughters. Naming ceremonies are highly important and secret affairs. Being invited to such an occasion is a sign that a gnome trusts you with his or her child's life, for they believe that Baba Yaga can find and kill any gnome whose true name she sniffs out.

METROPOLIS OF VOLVYAGRAD

This shabby river town is defended by the marshy land around it and by a tremendous grod, an earthen rampart topped with a wall of timber with extensive hoardings. Centaurs have learned that the swamp conceals dangers all around and that gnome night raiders are worthy foes, and their devilish allies even more so. Humans and dwarves are relatively common on its streets, centaurs a little less so (and they leave before nightfall in all but the worst weather). Many of the humans in Volvyagrad are Kariv of the Kalder clan, which sometimes serves the gnomes as scouts, diviners, and kidnappers.

The town is a trade outpost, taking silks, furs, and horses from the east in exchange for salt, fine wools, iron ingots, and salt cod and herring from the West. It is ruled by the Metropolitan of Mammon, and trade and taxation are its function. Without Volvyagrad, there would be insufficient gold to please the gnome king.

LESSER TOWNS OF NIEMHEIM

The towns within the Wormwood are poorly known and some are never visited by outsiders. Dorograd and Überlauten are the most outwardly focused.

DOROGRAD: A center of information gathering, Dorograd stands on a small hill overlooking the Rothenian Plain to the south. Visitors run a high risk of being kidnapped for use as sacrifices. It is filled with veteran scouts, bards, and snatch-and-grab artists. Stolen children, it is said, are taken to Dorograd for sacrifice to the dark gnome gods in its large temple district.

HEXEN: Deep in the forest heart of Niemheim, the rumored city of Hexen is off-limits to all but gnomes. It is said to be home to a college of hundreds of gnome wizards and witches who create new spells and summon new servants for the king, but no one is sure what truly goes on there. The last traveler to visit and return with a report was 150 years ago.

HELLERSBAD: Host to the king's summer palace, this small town is home to scholars, gnomes who fish the Nieder Straits, hot springs, and not much else. The town is sleepy even by gnome standards.

JANOSGROD: A lumbering town near a significant mithral deposit, Janosgrod is a working forge town with a strong defense. Most magical gnome blades bear its mark, a triangle within a circle.

KÖNIGSHEIM: Located at the mouth of the River Brocken, Königsheim is a significant center of gnome trade, finance, and worship. It is famous for its cherry brandies and for the Black Spire, the city's enormous black temple to Chernobog. The spire is built entirely of black bricks and continuously echoes with prayers. Königsheim is home to a significant order of dark cavaliers and (some say) anti-paladins. The gnome cavaliers call themselves the Hellspurs.

OSTZIG: This small trading port is the gnome naval center and home to a few fast ships. The gnomes trade little with others, but their expeditions can sometimes bring a fortune to the Northlands, Vidim, or the duchies of Dornig. They never leave the Nieder Straits.

ÜBERLAUTEN: A city of soldiers, trained wolves, and permanent suspicion, this is the gateway to Krakova, Courlandia, and the west beyond the forest. The gnomes obviously expect an invasion because the city is well fortified and its walls enchanted.

ADVENTURES IN NIEMHEIM

Most common adventures in Niemheim involve hunts in the forest or shadow warfare against gnome plots.

- A Kariv matriarch offers a reward to chase and kill a foul gnome seen in the area. The adventurers must capture the Zharadnik before she can plant the quickened seeds.
- A centaur shaman requires a glower stone for study. He offers the adventurers high-quality equipment should they steal a glower stone and return it.
- A Khazzaki camp was raided by devils and gnomes. Many were dragged away to a nearby sprouting. Riches are offered for any willing to assault the sprouting and rescue the kidnapped riders.
- The party are hired by merchants in Vidim to escort them on a harrowing journey to the city of Holmgard. Once there, they are summoned by King Redbeard, who offers them magic in exchange for the death of Ambassador Xingat. Though the ambassador will return, the king plans to use the time to further his secret plots to break the diabolical pact.
- Baba Yaga has caught wind of King Redbeard's dealings with her daughter. She offers the adventurers a boon to discover the nature of her daughter's communication with the king. The adventurers are swept up in the dealings and double dealings of the king, the vila, and the great witch herself.

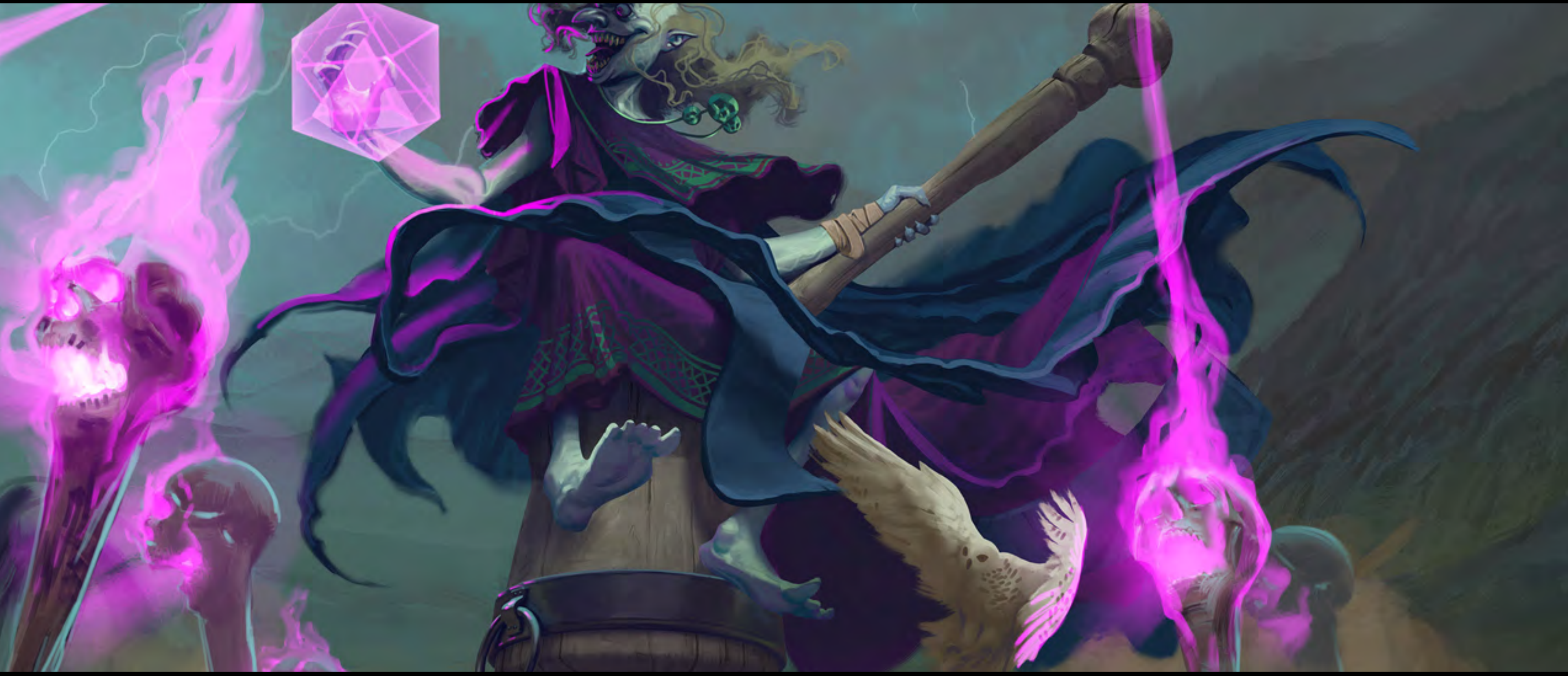
ROTHENIAN PLAIN

4

Life is hard in the open lands where only the wind is free. Among the rolling, endless grasslands of the Rothenian Plain, Kariv bands dance among gaudy, mule-drawn wagons, keeping an uneasy peace with the centaurs. From these empty quarters come strange alliances of man and centaur to wrest gold from the cities and kings, to assault the walls of Morgau's Cloudwall, and to steal the secrets of the infernal gnomes of Niemheim.

No hand is friendly here. The region's few cities are held in fists of iron, and robber barons command the river-roads. Any place where two stones are piled together is hostile to nomads, though friendly to mercenaries. The stout warriors of the Khazzaki ride tough steppe ponies for plunder. Baba Yaga plays one leader against another, a friend for a month or a year—and then a bitter foe. The boyars and the ravenfolk of Vidim vie for the tsar's ever-shifting favor but remain united to protect Vidim against external threats.

The roads that connect the most civilized places are as dangerous and wild as the uncharted prairie. Bandits from Misto Cherno and heartless centaur raiders control the roads, preying on the weak and ill-prepared. The Wandering Realm is crisscrossed with the trails of the nomads, whose trajectories change as quickly



as the whims of Baba Yaga. To walk the trails across the Plain is to risk your life, though you may learn something about a wandering heart from the journey.

The steppes smell of wild thyme all summer long, when the golden grass parts before a rider's horse with a dry whisper and the wind takes flight to the horizon. The lands lie beneath pure white blankets of snow in the winter, when few dare travel far. The people of the Rothenian Plain wander the horizon, holding tight to their freedoms and fighting hard to keep their herds moving, their hearts bold, and their people strong.

Kariv magic, centaur steel, and the finest bows ever strung await you—if you are strong enough!

Baba Yaga chases curious centaurs off her land—the slowest of them will wind up as a new skull guarding her home.

GRANDMOTHER BABA YAGA

Many tales feature the bony-legged fey witch Baba Yaga, and most of them contradict each other. It's hard to get a sense of Baba Yaga, and many suspect that's exactly what she wants. Indeed, little happens anywhere that isn't exactly as she desires. As convoluted and dark a mystery as Baba Yaga is, bits of her story rise to the surface and provide more truth than the rest, like foam on a bubbling stew.

Baba Yaga is a trader of secrets. It's said there's nothing she does not know. The brave, the desperate, and the stupid make pilgrimages to seek her wisdom, but she is rarely found when she doesn't want to be. Those who find her regret it when she attempts to force them into her service—as a beast of burden or common tool—or eats them, having developed a taste for mortal flesh. Rarely, she seeks out those in most need of her assistance, when it serves her purposes as well.

For those who can trick her out of her impossible secrets and escape her whims, all knowledge is within reach. Grandmother makes it her business to know everything: the last thoughts of the dying star Tovaya while in its death throes; the directions to Buyan, the mystical island of the dead; the life and times of the Forgotten Queen and why she was erased from history; the Words of Unfounding that can never be unspoken and that would unseat the gods; the true names of every creature never born; the secret network of byways that cross reality; and the circumstances that bring an end to the world.

For a dangerously high price, Grandmother will part with her knowledge. The price might be a first kiss, a final breath, a forgotten artifact, or an impossible wager that forces the seeker to attempt a task with no real possibility of success. Those rare individuals who make their way past these trials and gain her secrets survive in tales. Those with knowledge she desires have a rare sway over her since she will offer much to obtain it—though it's still best not to push her too far since she's not one to ever forget a slight. Grandmother does not stoop to haggling.

The Wandering Towns

The Rothenian Plain has no real permanent settlements, but it does contain the gulyay-gorod (literally "wandering town").

Each moving town is a mobile fortification made from large wall-sized prefabricated shields set on wagons or sleds, which provide full or partial cover for all inhabitants inside. The structure is easy to pull with oxen or draft horses and without any need to set up tents or unpack goods when moving.

These enormous wandering towns include Misto Cherno (a bandit wandering town, primarily a home to fallen Kariv and wild or bandit centaurs), Misto Ellel (the town of runes, a home to mystics, it floats without wheels and is drawn by swans or reindeer or even stranger things), and Misto Tilla (drawn by 100 oxen, with a battery tower as part of the wagon that carries two ballistae, the home of a notorious Khazzaki warlord and his harem). Wandering gulyay-gorod come and go, but the tales of them expand with each retelling.

All the mortal kings, the lords of heaven and hell, and the gods themselves leave Grandmother alone out of fear. Her secrets could unravel the skein of the world—or so she claims, and it is in her interest to make others believe it. She is content with all her knowledge, but she gladly demolishes those foolish enough to test her. Many have been erased from history for their wasted efforts to best her. She is the consummate schemer, a hundred steps ahead of the opposition with contingencies in place for even the most outlandish of possibilities. The wise let her be. The foolish seek out her hut.

Dancing Hut of Baba Yaga

Grandmother and her daughters live in remarkable dwellings that appear as small log huts with stone chimneys—and enormous chicken legs. Grandmother's hut is the largest of these, said to contain 20 or 40 rooms, an entire mansion of kitchens, cages, and kettles to please the crone's vile heart. Her hut is incredibly difficult to find for those who don't know how to look, and it constantly shifts its location. It permits entry only to those who address it politely. Though incapable of actual flight, Grandmother's hut can make mile-long leaps several times a day; the sight of her hut leaping across the horizon is a good reason to hasten indoors.

Her daughters' huts are newer and smaller, their legs only the height of a horse. Even they contain a half-dozen rooms and comfortable lodgings for the winter or summer, complete with a cellar and feather beds.

The dancing huts travel when commanded by their owners, down from the Cloudwall Mountain valleys, across the Rothenian Plain, though the deepest glades of the Margreve, or along the banks of the River Tanais. The huts have even been sighted in the North, among the Riphean Mountains near the halls of the frost giants.

The huts are not combatants, though they deliver hard kicks in retaliation to attacks. Most are enchanted with wards and alarms that trigger when the hut is threatened. They move swiftly (50 ft. base speed) across the land, ignoring most terrain-based hindrances, and swimming across churning rivers without effort.

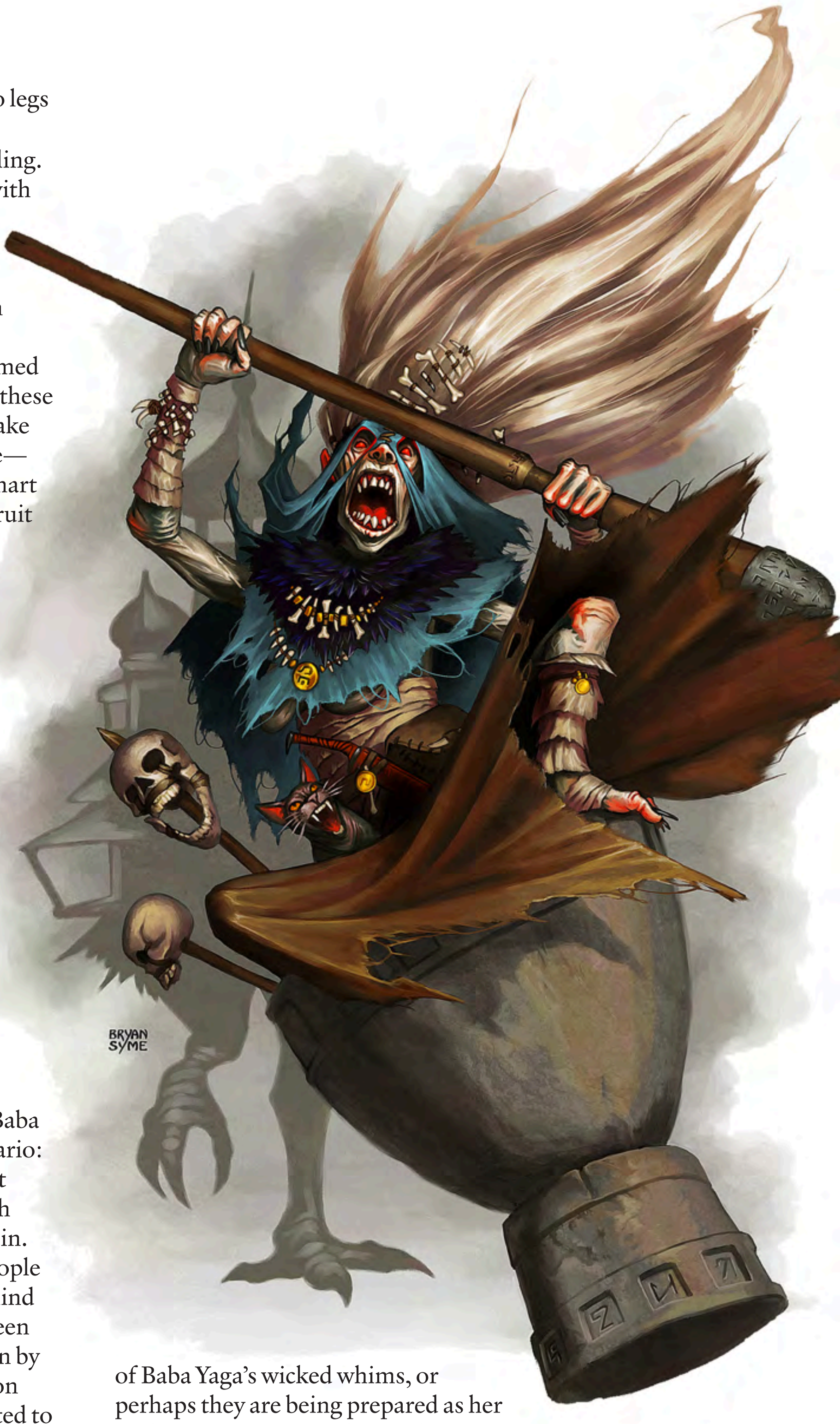
The Inconstant and Timeless Witch

No living being can comprehend Baba Yaga's motives. Her actions and disposition are inconstant, unpredictable, and extremely dangerous. Even her most devoted mystics cannot predict what Grandmother will do next. The stories about Baba Yaga are one part dire warning and one part nonsense. Scribes writing about the great witch occasionally find their writing vanished the next day while others find their words have turned into earthworms, writhing in their scroll cases. A painting of the witch commissioned by a duke transformed itself into a window to the Outer Realms. The duke and his family went mad after gazing through it. The painting was set to be [redacted] sprouted two legs and fled into a river.

The witch enjoys company when the bold come calling. Those who quest to find her hut are often rewarded with a meal. Survivors of these audiences say Baba Yaga is so filled with secrets and knowledge, she maintains two distinct topics of conversation in one utterance. It is up to the guests to decipher which thread is which in her overflowing speech. Her hut is filled with the souls of those who failed her. Transformed into common household items or domestic animals, these sad beings retain all their memories and sentience. Take care when choosing your seat at Grandmother's table—you might find yourself sitting on forgotten kings! Smart heroes in danger from the witch would do well to recruit the aid of these shapeshifted victims; their rage and sadness might be harnessed against the crone.

Grandmother appears to have the power to be in several places at once. Some scholars suggest she has numerous twin sisters, all of whom are named Baba Yaga, and all of whom do her bidding. Many believe the witch is free from the tyranny of time and wanders from moment to moment as she pleases. Her sojourns across the timelines create an endless stream of echoes, each her and yet not her. The truth lies somewhere between; after all, the sheer volume of knowledge acquired by Grandmother Yaga requires multiple minds to store it.

It could be that her sisters ensure her immortality. Like wooden dolls set inside one another, so too are the iterations of the great witch unified and endless.



Deaths

Once in a while a story circulates about the death of Baba Yaga. Witnesses to her deaths describe a similar scenario: the witch appears, normally in an unexpected place at an odd hour. She then recites a little song and through a series of incomprehensible actions, finds herself slain. She never cries out or interacts with the crowds of people gathered to watch her demise. She seems to pay no mind to others at all during these many suicides. She has been immolated, crushed, drowned, stung by insects, eaten by wolves, launched through the air at castle walls, and on and on. One of her mystics claims the deaths are related to Grandmother's walks through time—but none can be sure.

Daughters of Baba Yaga

Occasionally seekers find Baba Yaga with her daughters, the beautiful fey known as vila. Although there is no apparent record of the crone's life, it seems unlikely that she descends from vila stock. Typically, vila do not age, staying beautiful forever. Vila do not have children, so it seems unlikely that they should truly be her daughters. Nevertheless, Baba Yaga treats them with a tenderness that she shows no one else. Perhaps they are victims of Baba Yaga's wicked whims, or perhaps they are being prepared as her replacements. One of them, Eldara, is a particular favorite of the Despot of the Ruby Sea; others are seen more commonly in the Margreve Forest, in the palace of the Magdar, or dining with the Tsar of Vidim.

The vila have the power to grant divine-like boons to those who work in their interest. Some arcane scholars argue the boons are witch-hexes inverted by unknown magic; others see the work of Loki in them and warn against accepting them. The effects of these boons include immunity to hunger and thirst, resilience to exhaustion, and truesight.

[redacted]

assist Baba Yaga in devouring guests and some take pity on travelers and help them escape. Some of them have witch's huts of their own, though rarely as well appointed or as well warded and enchanted as Grandmother's hut.

Mystics of Baba Yaga

Those who have close encounters with the witch are rarely the same afterward. Some go mad, and others flee their homes and are never heard from again. To speak with Grandmother is to hear the answers to questions you hadn't dreamed of, and see futures and pasts from parallel worlds. The effect of conversing with Baba Yaga takes a different toll on each person. Some abandon their former lives and dedicate themselves to further pursuing the secrets of the witch. These mystics of Baba Yaga are found roaming across Midgard, rattling off portents and seeing meaning in each small coincidence. The mystics are convinced that Grandmother leaves messages and signs behind her as she travels—and they believe the witch travels everywhere. Though they lack unity, sometimes the mystics come together to share what they have learned. These gatherings might last weeks as the followers of the crone pile meaning upon meaning to one another's stories.

The Witch's Garden

Deep in a valley nestled between serpent-infested hills grows the wicked garden of Baba Yaga. Master of the bubbling cauldron, Baba Yaga is renowned for her potions, draughts, and poultices. With access to all manner of exotic and rare ingredients, there is little the witch cannot brew. It is said that the crone has crossed time and worlds to gather seeds for her garden and that an herb exists there capable of healing any affliction—including those inflicted by the gods themselves.

The serpents in the hills around the valley offer a deadly hazard to those wishing to find the garden. Grandmother's magic has made the snakes' venom particularly deadly;

typically die within hours of being injected. To make matters worse, the bodies of those who die from the poison sometimes return as foul undead monstrosities.

Mindless thralls (beings who angered or failed her) tend the garden, which is hidden from mortal eyes and scrying magic. A powerful elemental being known only as the Keeper oversees the garden and its workers. The fauna near the garden worship the Keeper and have gained intelligence from living so close to its magic. The minions of the Keeper are earth elementals, which bore through the area around the garden, acting as scouts and guardians. The elementals sometimes serve as gatherers for the crone, traveling across the plain and beyond to obtain rare plants.

The garden lies in a series of interconnected caves deep in the valley's reaches. The caves are lit by brilliant blue fungi and green fireflies that flit from leaf to blossom and radiate nourishing rays. An underground stream and aquifer provides water to the garden, as well as fish and insects for the thralls to eat. It is said the garden can be accessed by underground paths through the hills—though the location of the entrance is not known.

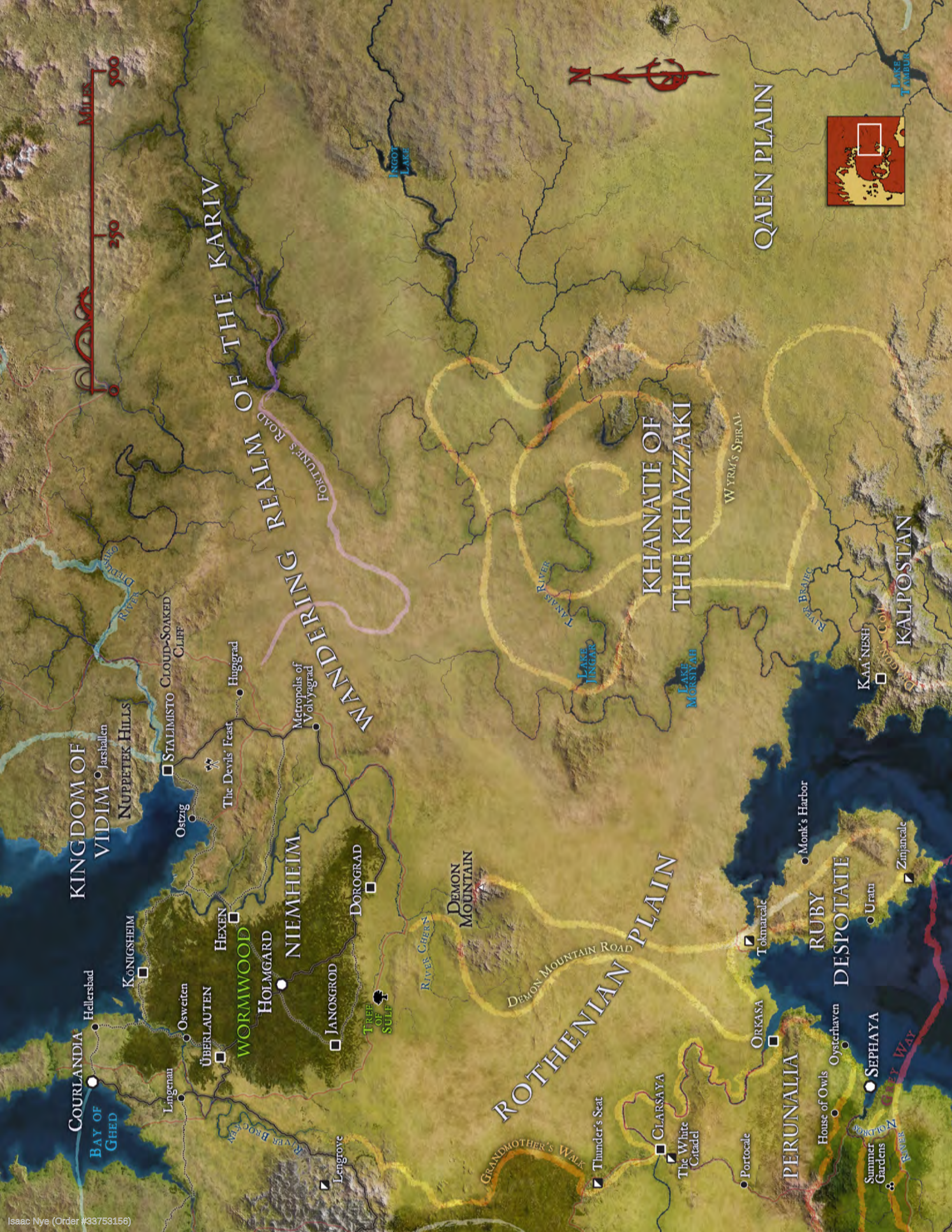
Koschei the Deathless

Through trickery or persuasion, Baba Yaga has gained many powerful allies—whether unwilling or unwitting, it makes no difference to her as long as they serve her interests. Most important among them is Koschei the Deathless. This dreaded figure's origin is lost to time. His defenders claim his descent from the living to his current state was one of tragedy and betrayal, painting him as a sad victim; others, less generous, believe his wickedness as a living creature was his downfall and the fuel for his vile transformation. Whatever the cause, Koschei is eternal. Most believe his soul is embedded within an egg hidden in a duck nestled within a hare that rests within a goat. Only the destruction of that egg will allow Koschei's destruction.

[redacted]

Baba Yaga Adventures

- A large stone obelisk travels from place to place across the Plain. Following a set pattern and schedule, the stone appears with the names of various residents of the Rothenian Plain written on its face. What does it mean when the adventurers discover the stone with their names engraved upon it? The old mystic of Baba Yaga knows and will share her knowledge for a price.
- A noble family's eldest child has fallen ill with an incurable disease. Desperate, the family wishes to hire adventurers to find Baba Yaga's garden [redacted] Apothecaries wait for the plants to experiment and hopefully create a cure. The party must find the location of the garden, travel to it, and defeat or bargain with its guardians.
- The discovery of a powerful magical item leads to an encounter with the treasure's rightful owner, Baba Yaga. Rather than shatter the adventurers instantly, the inconstant witch allows them to keep the item provided they perform a simple task: cut down the Tree of Sulf (see Chapter 3) growing in Niemheim's largest sprouting.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Miles
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Tanais River
Lake Jingar
Lake Morsiyah
River Brajec
Kalpostan
Dragon's Coil
Kaa'nesh
Dieduszko River
Cloud-Soaked Cliff
Huggrad
Metropolis of Volvyagrad
Kingdom of Vidim
Jarshallen
Nuppetek Hills
Stalimisto
The Devils' Feast
Ostzig
Niemheim
Dorograd
Hexen
Königsheim
Holmgard
Wormwood
Janosgrod
Tree of Sulf
Demon Mountain
River Chern
Demon Mountain Road
Rothenian Plain
Monk's Harbor
Zinjancale
Tokmarcale
Ruby Despotate
Uratu
Orkasa
Oysterhaven
Sephaya
Grey Way
Perunalia
House of Owls
Noldros River
Summer Gardens
Hellersbad
Courlandia
Osweiten
Überlauten
Lingenau
Bay of Ghed
River Brocken
Lengrove
Grandmother's Walk
Thunder's Seat
Clarsaya
The White Citadel
Portocale

The goat in question was supposedly tied to a great oak on the fabled island of Buyan, but it is believed that Baba Yaga currently controls the goat and therefore the egg, and whosoever controls the egg also controls Koschei. He has no love for the crone and would prefer his freedom, but he obeys her commands unquestioningly. He does not know where the goat is, and it is unclear whether he could take possession of it even if he could find it.

Koschei is a gaunt and pallid version of the man he was in life, and he rides an equally gaunt black mare. His wretched appearance and calm demeanor belie his incredible power. He is an incarnation of death, some say an avatar or herald of Chernobog or Perun. Few can withstand his onslaught when he wades into battle on his steed, betraying a glimmer of satisfaction and enjoyment in the slaughter.

Despite its emaciated appearance, his intelligent steed is among the fastest in the multiverse and appears to be bonded to Koschei, apparently sharing his fate.

DOMOVOGROD

Once the bright star in the north, the Silver Mountain Kingdom has fallen. Its rich lands at the feet of the Riphean Mountains are overrun with the ogres, trolls, and giants of the Northlands. Vellarsheim, the Mountain City, is now the stronghold of a repugnant Thursir warlord whose gluttony has made him too heavy to move. From the throne room of the ruined capital, Mensnark Obsbane commands a small army of giants and ogres, who gleefully stamp out the surviving inhabitants of this once-thriving kingdom.

The winterfolk halflings fared slightly better than their human counterparts. Forced from their comfortable hills, they fled into the wolf-infested forests of Domovogrod. From their new hidden homes, the halflings wage difficult, sporadic war against the invaders.

The Winter Tree, once cared for by the All Mother, now sits untended. Explorers say the giants hoped to use its branches to raid the Elflands. Recently, however, there have been sightings of shadowy creatures stalking the valley where the tree grows; none know the tree's current condition or the state of the healing well at its base. A few winterfolk rangers and druids have appointed themselves its guardians.

Olersheim, a small, fur-trading town, remains under human control for now. From this defendable location, the last remnants of Domovogrod train and plot against the invaders. Nicosai the Fleet, ex-captain of the Drakon Guard, survived the onslaught. She was badly maimed during the battle to defend Vellarsheim, and she is now a revenge-obsessed leader to the few hundred Domovogrodians who remain in Olersheim.

KHANATE OF THE KHAZZAKI

The Plain is filled with human nomads who call themselves Khazzaki. They are followers of Svarog and Khors and Perun and Sweet Golden Lada, though Svarog is their patron. Their cities are built of tents and flesh and rope, and the people are often driven from their chosen site before the wind, but they are no less formidable for that. Their master, the Khan of the Khazzaki, rules from the City of Wheels. His nation stretches wherever hoof beats thunder, from the Cloudwall to Far Cathay.

The riders, tribes, and khans of the Khazzaki are a mixed lot: adventurers and raiders, nomads and centaurs. Anyone who swears fealty to the khan is welcome in their tents, and guests are honored for a night even in deepest winter. They ride to war over frozen fields, their ponies small but fast and incredibly tough, like their riders. Indeed, the horses of the Khazzaki are never shod except when they must leave the plain, and they rarely do.

KHAN OF THE KHAZZAKI

The current Khan of the Khazzaki is Bodhan Zenody, an archer, a rider, a scholar, and a man of infinite cunning and artful compromise who has ruled for almost 20 years. He is now ready to consider a great toss of the dice, a run at looting one of the great nations such as Cathay or Khandiria in the east, the Mharoti in the south, or the rabble of Niemheim or the Magdar in the west. He commands an army, his generals are tested and loyal, and the shamans and outriders tell him that the Khazzaki are perhaps a bit lazy, in need of a test.

Bodhan Zenody does not rest easy. If he gambles and fails, one of his three sons will surely take the title of Khan of Khans. The adventurous life of the Khazzaki is a sword dance away from complete collapse, yet his people trust him to lead them to glory.

DOMAINS OF THE KHAZZAKI

The chief inhabitants of the Plain are the Khazzak Brotherhoods, nomads descended from an unlikely mix of Northern raiders, ancient steppe dwellers, and Kariv nomads. They have no cities and live as roving horse and ox herders, and occasionally as farmers. They are free wanderers and adventurers, unlike the serfs and slaves of Reth-Saal or Vidim.

To the north are the Plains of Rhos Khurgan, land of the red mounds, burial sites of an ancient race. The Khazzaki roam these rolling hills and grasslands east of the Nieder Straits, though their range extends south to the Ruby Sea. Here wild horse clans pour libations of blood and wine over ancient barrows, honoring dead heroes and Svarog the Rider, their patron god.

The southernmost section of the Rothenian Plain is a larger region where the Khazzaki travel to get away from the “settled” region of Rhos Khurgan. The open lands of the Khanate include a few small taiga forests, many rolling hills and gently sweeping rivers, and an endless supply of grass. They end to the south at the foothills of the Dragoncoil Mountains, where the Mharoti city of Kaa’nesh is a home of ogres and dragonkin who despise the free-riding Khazzaki bands.

The khan has repeatedly tried to capture the city, and repeatedly failed. The Mharoti have sent one army out into the grasslands against the Khazzaki. The tribesfolk consider it a point of pride that Kharalang the Wind Dragon slew the army’s drakes, and the Khazzaki riders harried the Mharoti infantry all the way back to Kaa’nesh, shooting the last few retreating edjet within sight of the city walls.

No second army has yet been assembled to tread upon the Khanate’s tall grass.

Red Mounds of Rhos Khurgan

For each stone cup of wine they drank, they poured two atop the nearest mound. The dissonant horns and strings of their victory song echoed over the silent burial sites—whose stones were as red as blood, even in the moonlight.

Tucked away in the northern territory of the Khanate, near the banks of the Tanais River, are the red mounds of Rhos Khurgan. The mounds total 31, though a single similar mound stands a dozen miles east of the larger site—this outlier mound is built on the shores of a small lake and fouls the air for a half-mile around it. The Khazzaki stay away from the 32nd mound entirely, believing it to be cursed.

Each mound consists of compacted earth and red shale stones arranged to form a dome roughly 15 feet in diameter. The mounds appear to have had an entrance on their southern edge, but these passageways collapsed years ago. Though their components are entirely natural (rock, earth, grasses), they have stood up well against the elements. They also resist magic that would disturb them. The mounds are burial sites to a lost and forgotten race. Protected by the Khazzaki, the mounds have never been excavated, though some recovered bones suggest the buried were tall humanoids.

The Khanate considers the red mounds to be a sacred site, visited only after a successful raid or campaign. The Khazzaki celebrate their victories among the mounds, drinking, singing, and thanking their ancestors. It is considered customary to offer the mounds drink during these celebrations, and casks of wine are often emptied into the parched soil of the mounds. Refusing to offer the mounds a drink is one of the greatest offenses one can make against the Khazzaki, and those who deny the mounds their portion are buried alive nearby.

Divine magic is warped and changed in the region where the mounds are built. Clerics, paladins, and other spellcasters who derive their magic from the gods find it difficult to choose spells while resting within a mile of a mound. Despite their most ardent prayers, these casters find their spells chosen for them—a selection intended to offer only defense.

KHANATE OF THE KHAZZAKI

Symbol: A black circle on a gold field

Ruler: Bodhan Zenody (LE male human ranger 10/fighter 4)

Important Personages: Akka the Old One (NE female human); Yakev Illyonevik (LN male human); Pylyp Faddovik (CN male human); Black Mother Yeva (CE female human); Clan Mother Lumenita Leanti (N female human); High Smith Olek Svaresh (N male human)

Population: 390,000 (370,000 humans, 20,000 centaurs)

Capital: Misto Kolis, population 8,200 (7,500 humans, 600 centaurs, 100 huginn)

Towns: Various nomadic armies and camps

Great Gods: Svarog (Volund, patron of the Khazzaki), Loki, Perun, Veles, Yarila and Porevit

Trade Goods: Horses, oxen, leather, saddles, plunder, tents

Khazzaki Camps

A typical encampment of the Khazzaki includes 100 to 300 men, women, and children, with a family of friendly centaurs as allies and auxiliaries. These centaurs are called the kin ludi, or the horse friends, of the clan. The Khazzaki believe that Svarog creates centaurs out of his most deserving human followers. These camps are entirely mobile and rarely stay in one place long (even in winter, the steppes ponies can survive on forage from beneath the snows). They wander widely in the summer grazing and raiding season, and journeys of 100 or 300 miles are considered no great hardship, a matter of a few days’ ride.

At the end of summer, all Khazzaki camps send emissaries to pledge their fealty to the khan at Misto Kolis, and to prepare for winter and spring raids. Their ability to fight in the snows makes them extremely dangerous, and all the Khazzaki’s neighbors know better than to relax their watch at the first snowfall of winter.

Misto Kolis, the City of Wheels

Moving across the plain on the back of creaking carts, the City of Wheels is the Khanate's nominal capital and main trading center, as nomadic as the people it serves. Most of the city is made up of palatial orgoo (massive pavilions) and collapsible buildings of light wood that can be packed onto wagons or pack horses when the city roves.

Famed for its wrestlers, jugglers, jesters, and other entertainers, the city frequently appears to be one giant drunken party—although much trade and diplomacy goes on quietly amid the drink and games. Families come and go, but the city is heavily influenced by the Khanate's Woolen Palace and by the Kariv Leanti family, ruled by Clan Mother Lumenita Leanti in the Kariv style, especially when the khan is raiding. There are more Kariv gathered here than anywhere else, though the city's population fluctuates wildly.

Black Strangles

The disease that is affecting the horses of Trombei and the centaur hordes of the plain has also spread to the horse and pony herds of the Khanate. For now the khan has managed to keep the disease from wiping out his stock of horses, but the speed at which the disease spreads poses a challenge. Animals afflicted by the disease are slain and burned, their ashes buried deep under the wild flowers and sage brush.

The Grassweavers of Perun

Very recently, the khan has allied with a strange order of Perunian druids. These overly tall and spindly limbed humans shuffle across the Plain in suits of armor made from woven grasses. They gather in groups of seven, never less and never more—living in one communal grass hut built so low they must stoop to enter. They speak the Common tongue but communicate among each other in a rustling, clicking language all their own. The identities of [redacted] sinister masks made from sticks and grass. Everywhere they walk, the natural order slides sideways. Though their magic adds to the khan's power, they hate the kin ludi centaurs, and the khan seeks a way to end this enmity. The khan hopes that the druids will offer a cure for the black strangles, the strange withering disease that threatens his prized pony herds.

None know their purpose or their origin. For now, they are content to heal the khan's wounded and worship the ferocious electric storms that tear across the Plain.

Across the Plain

The following sites can be found anywhere the Khazzaki roam.

Ashen Spirit-House: A tall and teetering tent made from swirling ash, dirt, and animal bones, the Ashen Spirit-House is the teleporting home of Black Mother Yeva. The tent appears only in storming winds in the late fall and only in the hissing grass of the open plain. Chernobog's brooding sorcerer-priestess works strange and foul curse magic in the shadows of her abode. That she is a mother is uncontested, though what dark things call her such is another matter entirely.

The Black Wagon: Khazzaki and Kariv alike tell tales of the black wagon, a Kariv caravan painted entirely black. It's never seen on the move, only encountered camped, no horses to be seen. The wagon's sole occupant is Akka the Old One, a broken-toothed oracle who foretells only doom. Meeting her means an encounter with the Ebon Mare of death cannot be far off.

Krasni Yurta: This great red tent made from silk flies across the plain on the wind and whims of Yakev Illyonevik. The billowing walls of Krasni Yurta are made from magical silk as strong as steel. Its interior is actually a pocket dimension that only Yakev and his chosen guests [redacted]

Kharalang, the Great Dragon of the Plain

When travelers think of the Rothenian Plain, they think of the various tribes of the region and of the raiders who sometimes gather to burn out Magdar towns and villages. They also, invariably, think of Kharalang. Some believe its home lies on Demon Mountain, but no search has revealed its lair. Scudding clouds, a rising wind, and falling temperatures usually announce its presence; hail and even thunder are common heralds.

Those who attack the dragon with spells and arrows have not, as yet, reported on the results of this approach.

The stories of Kharalang's hoard provide a form of humor and amusement to the people of the Plain. It's a bit of an in-joke or initiation for them to mock visitors with a completely straight-faced account of the location of the dragon's hoard, often involving a long journey overland, diving into chill rivers, or digging up small hills in search of the gold.

No one laughs until after the visitor has gone off to search for the fabulous wealth, which the tale-spinner always says is "beyond the reach of a coward like me; beware the dragon's wrath!" This tale always seems to [redacted]

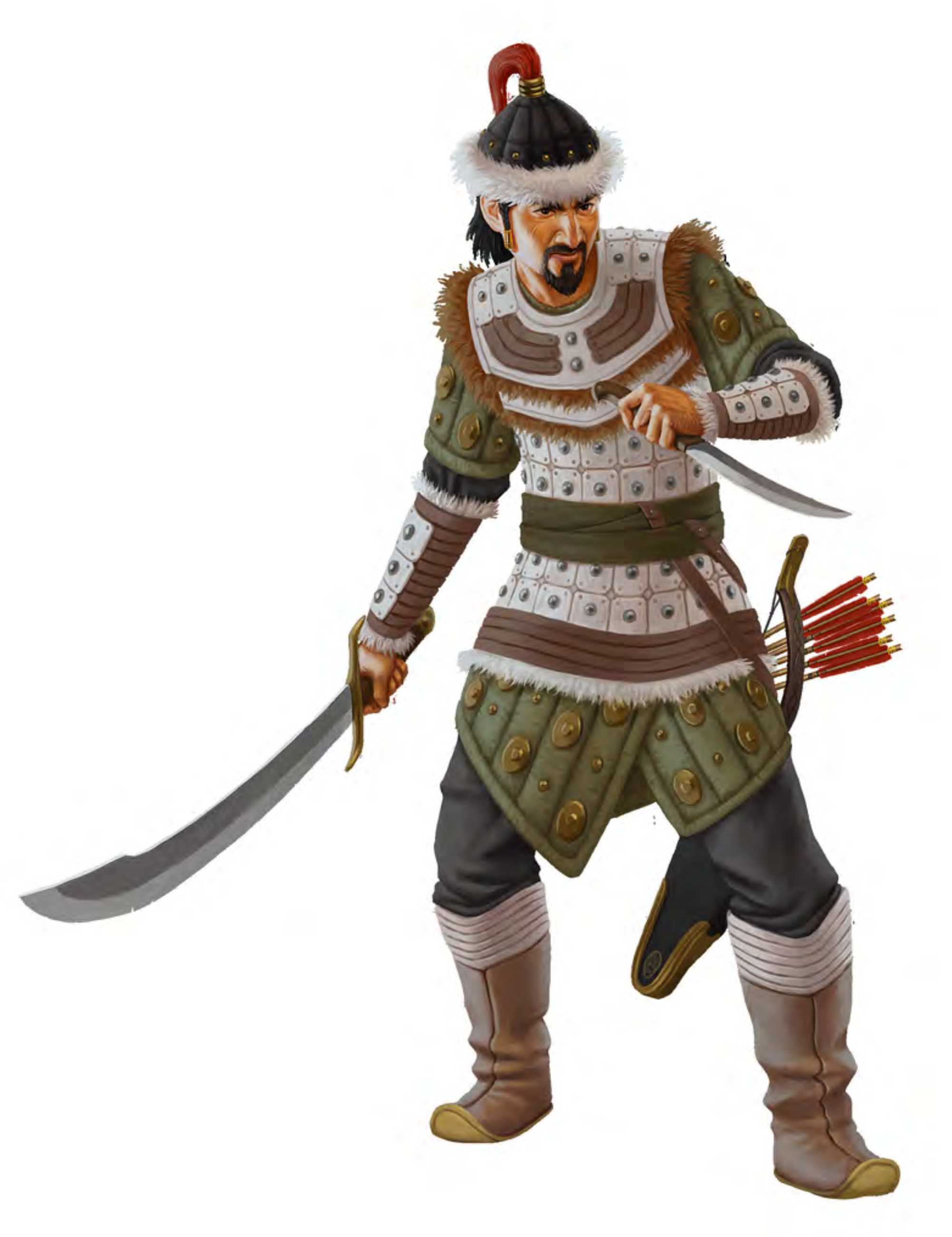
[redacted]

great black moustache stands in stark c
hair and obvious old age. It is said that
master of Demon Mountain and is oft
plots made against that infernal place.

Tent of Four Hands: This humble y
hide and hardwood is the home of Pyly
renowned pit fighter and former meml
Brotherhood mercenary company. It is
painted symbols on the exterior that d
four hands. Pylyp, a great bear of a mai
in meditation and training those who f
pass his tests. Unchecked, the eccentri
regales listeners with strange philosop
that only by striking something can yo
and true name.

Velesian Manes: Secret to all but th
the khan, a strange and powerful breed
been discovered roaming near Demon
massive beasts possess various subtle d
most often manifested as scaled manes
the animals resist most training, the kl
potential in their long strides. He keep
these animals in a hidden location. In c
the Grassweavers of Perun, he hopes tc
domesticated trait. To date, only he has
one, and the experience shook the kha
strongly that he disallows others from
making the attempt.

Yurt Monasteries: Scattered
across the Plain are tent monasteries
where monks, wizards, and sorcerer-p
studious seclusion. Many seek them ou
wise-women and hedge magic cannot s
problems. The steppes are home to stra
spirits, however, so it's wise to know ex
one is walking into.



THE THREE GREAT TREASURES OF THE KHAN

The Khan of the Khazzaki owns three great magical treasures: a horse, a bow, and a suit of armor.

Draugir

This night-black undead mount once belonged to Koschei the Deathless. The khan won the fearsome steed in a riding contest one winter. It is said that Koschei wants the mount back, but for reasons all her own, Baba Yaga does not allow him to reclaim it. Only the true khan can mount this steed; it has killed some contenders for the title by throwing them from its back into a chasm or pit of fire.

An'Ducyr

This powerful artifact is carved from the heartwood of a World Tree, built by a centaur bowyer as a gift for the khan. Some say that An'Ducyr or "Seeker" is the symbol of unity between Khazzaki and centaurs, the physical manifestation of their long alliance. The bow grants magical sight to its bearer once the string is drawn back, and its arrows are made from pure light.

The Dragoncoat

This suit of golden and silver scale armor is crafted from the heart scales of a wind dragon. In addition to its powerful protective battle enchantments, it provides immunity to poison, enchantments, and evocations of all kinds. It is passed on from one khan to another, and represents the Khanate's longevity and status on the plain. The suit is purported to have healing properties as well; the khans have, over many years, acquired a reputation for leaving a battlefield half-dead and returning to their armies in the morning, unscratched and ready for more.

Khazzaki Adventures

The nomadic hordes are proud warriors and fierce revelers. Adventures that involve the Khanate are violent, passionate, and demand high stakes.

- Khazzaki riders caught a group of explorers, scholars, and mercenaries from Zobeck excavating the red mounds of Rhos Khurgan. The Arcane Collegium hires the PCs to bring a valuable ransom to exchange for their release. Arriving in the Khanate, the PCs discover the expedition members were buried alive as soon as they were discovered. Taken captive, the heroes must escape and navigate the Plain while pursued by Khazzaki riders.
- Undead haunt an old fortress inside Khazzaki territory. Hired by Yalanta Moarg, a high-ranking rider in the City of Wheels to investigate, the PCs discover a link between the restless dead and the presence of Grassweavers of Perun, who dwell nearby. What will they do with this information?
- The eccentric warrior monk Pylyp Faddovik appears beside the PCs' camp one morning. His yurt, the Tent of Four Hands, magically teleported him to their location. Pylyp is on a quest to strike several powerful creatures to learn something of their nature: an ancient dragon, a demonic lord, and the Khan of the Khazzaki. Pylyp offers to train the party in his four hands fighting style if they agree to help him land a punch on these creatures of legend.

Centaur Hordes of the Plain

Centaurs are strange wanderers with no home or nation, half foolish and half wise when moved by drink or rage. The centaur clans are small, sometimes as few as a dozen or so members. All too often they serve as mercenaries, fighting someone else's war for little more than oats and cheese. When roused to anger, though, they burn out entire villages and sack small towns before returning to the Great Plain, richer and avenged.

Out in the wide grasslands and high in the hills, centaur bands make their lives as hunters, bandits, and nomads. Owing fealty to no one and nothing, they prize their fierce independence and claim they are willing to die rather than settle in any village, obeying only their chiefs and khans. Humans fear their violent tempers and drunken passions. Centaurs think humans are fools to live in huts of wood or stone when they could live free while moving across the great grasslands. These horsefolk would not—could not—live any other way.

Centaur legends claim they are the true sons and daughters of the wind and sky gods and that both humans and horses are their lesser cousins. Humans were made first, but their two legs and small size marked them as runts and weaklings, and Perun rejected them as too slow and too weak to survive a nomad's life. Horses were his second attempt: fast and strong and able to live by grazing anywhere on the wide Plain. But in time, their failings were clear as well, for they moved as a herd. The horses bred not heroes but followers and lacked the cunning of a hunter and the clever hands of a smith or archer.

Mocked by his wife for failing twice, Perun the Thunderer decided to make the third time count for all.

Demon Mountain

It hides its face behind wooded slopes. Its countenance is shrouded by the thick and unnatural clouds that roil around its peak and descend into nearby valleys. The barren hills at its base are filled with howling things that dance on cloven feet. Demon Mountain: a name known but never uttered. The daring souls who seek their fame on its unforgiving rises return with sulfur on their breath and madness in their eyes. "The Master," they whisper, a palace of bone, wine, and the wicked. There are rumors of spies sent out from this unholy place. Women and men sent down from the mountain, walking the plain and beyond—smiling toothily and always listening. More than one innocent has been set to death accused of being a witness for Demon Mountain. Even the great witch avoids both place and topic, though some believe she has a room in the storied palace of the Master.

In truth, the Master of Demon Mountain is an expert demon binder who claims to be the last living scion of the noble bloodline of Vael Turog. The binder has traded his freedom for knowledge; the palace that rose from the bones of the mountain in one night is his prison. He cannot leave his palace. Instead, the ruler of the mountain recruits spies from abroad, granting them unnatural powers in exchange for their service. Through unions and affairs with infernals, the Master has fathered dozens of tiefling children, whom he raises on the mountain before sending off to scour Midgard for a means to escape his lavish cell.

Adventurers who brave the evils of the slopes and climb to its peak may be invited for dinner with the Master. Their fate after the dishes are cleared is anything but certain.

Thinking carefully on the matter, he saw that the previo failings could be mended by matching human hands wi equine speed and power, so the centaurs were his third attempt at making a race to rule the grasslands. Centau keep this story to themselves, but they all believe in thei hearts it is entirely true.

The centaurs are true nomads, retreating to the hills and Rothenian high meadows in summer and returnin to lower elevations when the meadows are bare and the lure of rustling, banditry, and raiding grow strong. They are currently divided into those who live free in the east grasslands and those who hunt and serve as mercenarie human lands.

Rothenian Centaurs

Symbol: Varies by clan, often fur banners or colored streamers

Clan Chieftains: Anthal Engef (NG male centaur ranger 9), Chieftain of Clan Dargit; Tonth Kolmane (N male centaur bard 5/fighter 3), Chieftain of Clan Morav; Intha Ogol (NG female centaur druid 6/fighter 3), Matron of Clan Ogol; Yhrule Rhoet (NE male centaur barbarian 10), Chieftain of Clan Rhoet; Maldrath Sarras (CG female centaur rogue 6/sorcerer 3), Chieftain of Clan Sarras; Paloth Gour (CN male centaur druid 5/fighter 5), Chieftain of Clan Yengde

Population: Approximately 120,000, though estimates range up to 200,000

Major Clans: Dargit, Morav, Ogol, Rhoet, Sarras, Yengde

Great Gods: Perun (patron), the Twins of Wine (Yarila and Porevit), Khors, Lada, Boreas, the Hunter

Trade Goods: Leather, bows, weavings, grass rope, bone whistles

Clan Chieftain Paloth

Chieftain Paloth of the Yengde Clan believes that the centaurs would do better united under a single banner. His ambition to unite the centaurs is slowed by habit an history, though he has found some smaller clans amena to the idea. The Khan of the Khazzaki is firmly against Paloth's efforts since it would rob his armies of powerfu centaur mercenaries.

Centaur Wealth

Centaurs measure wealth in goats and sheep, which they use for leather, wool, and meat, and for the making of panniers, blankets, and tents. The last is especially important—a woolen tent is a sign of adulthood. "Leav the tent" is a way of speaking of a colt or filly reaching maturity, and "joining tents" is the typical euphemism f two centaurs who marry or who sire foals.

Centaurs use druidic magic, and they are powerful followers of both martial and earthy traditions. A few centaurs thrive as merchants, ever practical as traders among the clans, but most males are warriors first, and female centaurs are rarely seen outside the circles of a clan group. Centaur goods are the goods of nomads: lightweight and few in number. The heaviest goods of a centaur clan are the winter tents, heavy cloth panels that can be rigged with any stout wooden pole to create a shelter for young foals and centaur women.

Centaur summer and winter camps are matters of tradition. The same herd of centaurs returns to the same two or three favored sites year after year.

The Long-Teeth

The recent scourge known as the black strangles upon the horses in Trombei and the ponies of the Khanate has also afflicted the centaurs. In centaurs, the disease begins as a blackening of the hair and skin around the hooves. The rot spreads into the hoof, cause excruciating pain when standing or walking. The centaur then spends most of its time at rest, and this inactivity allows the disease to take hold. The afflicted's teeth grow to twice their normal size, and yellow visibly. Bright light hurts the victims, and they retreat into dark places to avoid the burning sensation caused by the sun's rays. Their thoughts grow dark, and they develop a compulsion to find other afflicted and to sink their teeth into the flesh of other centaurs.

The Long-Teeth present a new threat to the inhabitants of the plain. They travel in packs and form mockeries of their former clans. They roam at night, seeking unafflicted centaur flesh to bite—though they will happily gnaw on others. The disease does not kill the centaur, though in its final stage, the creature is reduced to a mindless cannibal, preying even on other afflicted.

It is thought that the disease was brought to the plain by a traveling centaur from Trombei, though the inhabitants of that kingdom believe the disease originated on the plain. Paloth of the Yengde tribe is leading an effort to find a cure. Working with the Khan of the Khazzaki and his Perunian druids, the chieftain has found a herbal poultice that prevents the disease from reaching its final stages. He has heard of a remedy in Trombei and seeks a way to acquire it. Perhaps with both cures together, the disease might be stopped.

The Clans

Centaur society includes three kinds of clans: the steppe nomads, the mercenary companies, and the bandits. Each of these has some kinship with the others, and all three share a fondness for direct election of their chiefs and war leaders. Centaur society is, above all, a meritocracy, where a king can be deposed by the will of his horde.

A Centaur Raid

Centaurs are happy to take anything that other races do not value enough to protect properly. This is usually livestock but also grains, cloth, and coin. A standard raid begins before dawn or at night, with centaurs shooting sentries with arrows enchanted with silencing magic before galloping to the attack in two groups; one is a diversion, meant to draw defenders away from the object of the raid, whether the target is a corral, barn, or storehouse for grain.

Centaurs are notorious for raiding wineries and brewer's shipments and for sacking them entirely. Some raiders consider their bows as instruments of revenge on those who build on the plain. They fire from up to 900 feet away, raining down large, fiery arrows to burn peasant huts or granaries. In addition, they create a form of poison unique to their kind; many Kariv and Khazzaki consider it a form of illness because of the fever and vomiting it induces over time.

At summer gatherings the captains, khans, and chiefs decide whether any clan or tribe must be avenged. These occasions are rare (perhaps twice a generation or so), but invariably, the entire centaur nation sweeps off the plain that summer to destroy border settlements, burn crops, and run riot against the defenses of the offending nation.

The Mharoti, the slavers of Reth-Saal, the king of Morgau, the Tsar of Vidim, and others have all learned this lesson well, so few dare to assault a centaur band.

Though there are many clans among the horde, the following are the most impressive and notorious.

Dargit, the Arrow Catchers

These master bowyers and mercenaries are led by a young warrior named Anthal. The Dargit have close ties with the Khazzaki, and they fashioned the khan's bow from Winter Tree heartwood attained through a costly raid on Domovogrod. The clan prefers mercenary work and traveling over raiding, lending their bows to rich warlords and merchants alike.

Morav, Song of the Prairie

The brave Morav keep the old songs alive. Led by the ever-smiling and enigmatic Tonth, the Morav clan can be found wandering year round. Once every few years, the songmasters form fearsome raiding parties and sing dark odes that strike terror into the heart of listeners. Tonth claims the arrival of the Long-Teeth and the strange disease that spawns them is connected to a dissonant melody heard on the plain when the stars are in a certain alignment. He claims he has learned to play the melody, but none can confirm this is true.

Ogol, Perun's Thunder

True nomads, Clan Ogol travels the centaur trails over the steppes, rarely making camp for more than a night or two. Though led by a warrior named Helthor, the true power of the clan resides in matron Intha, whose powerful druidic magic guides the clan according to the will of Perun. Clan Ogol searches the steppes for a legendary spear they call *Zonbol*—they believe the spear was wielded by Perun himself when he arrived on Midgard.

Rhoet, the Heartless

Led by a veteran raider and dark-hearted warrior named Yhrule, Clan Rhoet's warriors are famous for their cruel banditry and ties with Misto Cherno. They have been spotted guarding midnight caravans from Demon Mountain and are known both locally and abroad as dearnmas, "the heartless." The centaurs of Clan Rhoet hold grudges and enjoy taking offense, for nothing brings them more joy than crushing those who slight them.

Centaur Adventures

Centaur adventures often involve their sacred sites, or their uneasy relationships with the other inhabitants of the Plain.

- A bandit gang led by a centaur from Clan Rhoet has occupied a small village in Vidim. Locals claim the leader has a bow that fires serpents. Bite-victims of the serpents go mad within a few days. Investigating the bandits, the PCs discover the bandits' lair is adorned with dark shrines to Chernobog.
- PCs discover a camp of centaurs in the early stages of the black strangles. The sedentary victims plead with the heroes to help them, sending the party on a quest to meet the khan, travel to Trombei, and work to find a cure.
- The chieftain of the Morav clan seeks adventurers to explore a recently uncovered temple. Tonth believes that the temple built underneath a hill contains a portion of a powerful song written by an ancient race that once dwelled on the plain. After discovering the temple's connection to Chernobog, the PCs must decide if providing the music to the Morav is the wisest course.

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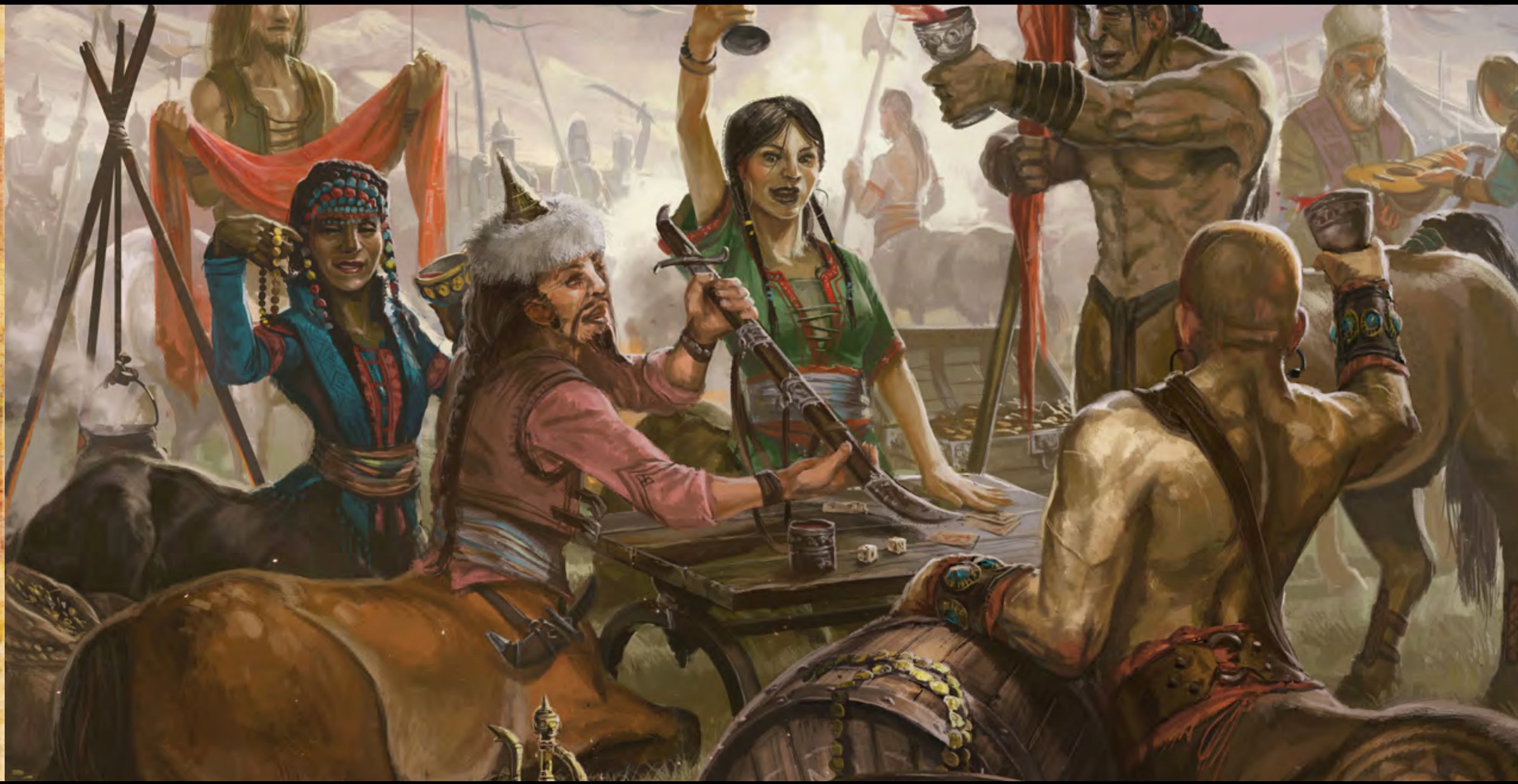

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year. Their chieftain, Maldrath, is a master trader and skilled wine maker. The clan sells their wild strawberry wines at knock-down markets in the spring and summer. They practice an old form of worship to Perun, and some claim their wine barrels are filled with blood before they make camp on the steppes in the winter.

Yengde, the Seventy Spears

Mercenaries and bandits alike, the centaurs of Clan Yengde are known as fierce warriors and loyal soldiers. Most follow their chieftain without question, and they agree with Paloth's assertions of centaur superiority. They are recognized in battle by their skill with the spear, often wielding two of the massive weapons at once.

Centaurs and Other Races

The Kariv understand the hardships of the road, and their smiths shoe centaurs for free (for good luck). In return, centaurs scout for and defend Kariv wanderers from human, goblin, or other bandits. More than once centaur information or lances have saved a Kariv caravan, and centaur bandits never rob the Kariv (they consider it ill-fated to rob the cursed).

gnomes and enjoy skewering them as the gnomes scatter before their hooves. However, some of the clans have agreed to a truce with Niemheim, and a few take positions as guards and sentries within the forest.

The Dargit and Yengde clans offer the most number of mercenaries, and it is not uncommon for centaurs of these clans to leave their people for years at a time. Warriors who return from long trips abroad, or service to a warlord, are welcomed back in celebration.

The centaurs and the windrunner elves once held a close connection. Recently, the elves have retreated east and abandoned their sacred sites and their work with the beasts of the plain. Not even the centaurs are certain why the elves left with such rapidity or if they plan to return.

Kingdom of Vidim

The Tsar of Vidim and the huginn (ravenfolk)—the elite birdfolk who are Vidim's best soldiers, traders, and spies—maintain a strange alliance in Vidim, a small but influential state that controls access to the Nieder Straits from the steppe. Vidim serves as a bulwark against the dwarven reavers and giant raiders from the Riphean Mountains, and it gathers much of the wealth of the Rothenian hinterland for shipment west along the Nieder Straits.

Vidim's people are poor but proud, and they trade generously with the dwarves. The Tsar of Vidim is famous for his piety and love of novelty and just as notorious for his fits of cruelty. The land's farmers are serfs, not slaves, though they are unable to leave the farms and manors of the boyars, the nobles who rule in the tsar's name.

Tsar of Vidim

The Tsar of Vidim, Alexor Yodorovic, is slowly going mad. His goals and desires change too often to effectively rule his people. He has obsessively pursued courtly dances, the memorization of poetry, religious zealotry, and woodworking all in the same year. His changing enthusiasm leaves little in the way of mandate or direction—both of which are overseen by his daughters and inner circle of advisers. Though he is losing his mind, his heart remains good, and his obsessions center around his notion of what is good for his people. His judgment in this area is lacking, however, and were he left alone to rule, great harm would come to the good people of Vidim.

The source of Alexor's madness is unknown. He is not aware of his condition, and his handlers are careful to avoid the use of the word. His daughter Alyenka is keenly interested in clearing her father's mind, and she eagerly confers with experts on ailments of the spirit.

His subtle madness is kept secret by his inner circle, which consists of his daughters, the huginn spymistress Viryeshka, and a collection of loyal boyars. The Kingdom of Ravens is kept from disaster by these loyal subjects, who imperfectly steer the tsar toward reason and measured responses. However, they cannot control him entirely, and many among the inner circle believe it high time Princess Alyenka ascend to the position of tsarina. For her part, she remains devoted to her father and rebukes those who would see him replaced. For now, his daughters and his trusted council ensure that the kingdom runs as smoothly as possible.

The tsar is a tall man with a thick black beard and piercing pale blue eyes. His countenance switches from stern to jovial with surprising speed. He wears silver rings on his bony hands, and they click and clatter together as he strokes his beard while speaking. He dresses in rich velvet robes and wears the traditional pointed cap of his people.

Huginn and Boyars

The tsar depends on two groups to maintain his rule in Vidim: the boyars and the huginn. The boyars are his nobles and vassals, the knights and judges of the realm, who hold land and serfs from the tsar. They are famous for their furry hats, enormous beards, and brightly colored, embroidered robes—indeed, a certain level of noble plumage is expected. The boyars fight the gnomes, the reaver dwarves, roving bands of centaurs, giants raiding from the north, and all other threats to the realm.

The huginn are another matter. These raven-headed people inhabit a rookery in Vidim, not far from the tsar's Scarlet Palace.

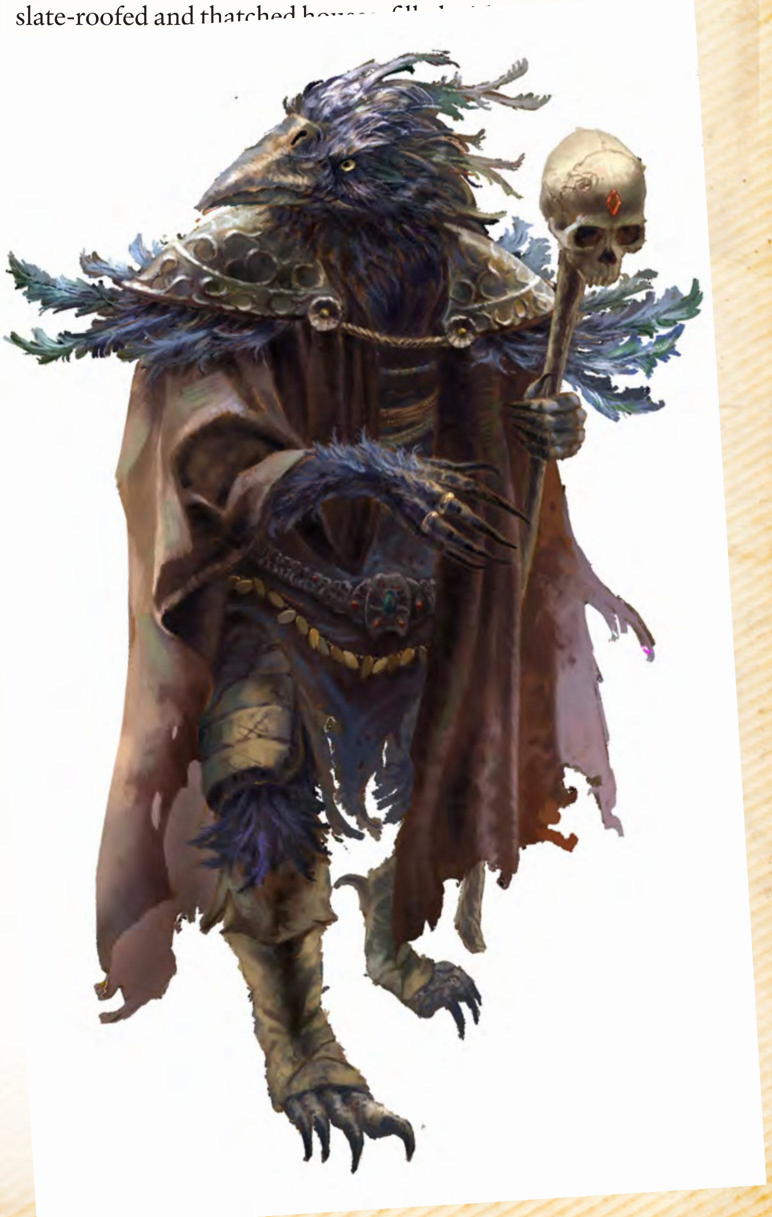
They are worshippers of Wotan and his messengers, closely associated with the priesthood of the Rune God, and cunning thieves and scoundrels. Their chieftain is Ukwak, a gray-feathered warrior who rides with the Vidim boyars. Their most notorious spy, Viryeshka Krasny, has taken a human name, and she sometimes disguises herself as a human, so good is her mimicry.

Most boyars and huginn do not trust each other, and the Perch of Huginn within the city of Vidim is sometimes the site of duels, murders, and outright assassinations. The tsar seems unable to control both sides strongly enough to bring an end to the heated rivalry.

Vidim, City of Crows

Vidim is a small city built in the eastern style, with earthen ramparts and a moat rather than a stone city wall. Sections of its wooden wall and hoardings are being replaced by stone as the tsar finds time and money.

Within its walls, Vidim is a tightly packed collection of slate-roofed and thatched



Vidim is famous for its Scarlet Palace of the Tsar, a fin building of carved wood and excellent gilded eaves, whi shares space on the main square with two other sights o note: the Giant's Skull cauldron and the Reaver's Hall. The hall was once used by dwarves, but they have since abandoned it to the boyars and merchants of the town. The Giant's Skull is the skull of an enormous Thursir gia chieftain slain by the current tsar's father. Visitors love i and consider it lucky; the tsar secretly wishes he could d half as well himself.

LESSER CITIES OF VIDIM

Bjornshafen: A small town with a large fishing fleet, Bjornshafen trades its salted catch and leather hides wit the Northlands and Niemheim. The town offers a tiny gift of salt and herring to every visitor during its Harves Festival.

Hugigrad: This town is dominated by a temple to Wo and a large rookery of huginn, called the Rookery of Hugigrad. Humans are welcome during the day, but the find the noise at roosting time intolerable. Hugigrad is simple farming town with large herds of cattle and goat

Stalimisto: This village was once little more than a wandering set of wagons, but its nomadic days ended when its travelers settled at the mouth of the River Nup Since then Stalimisto has grown into a small city with a wooden wall and a constant centaur problem because it pear orchards provide pear brandy each fall. The village pays a tribute to the nearest centaur tribes to protect th orchards from others.

SALT FINGERS

Along the northern coast of Vidim, a few miles past rim Bjornshafen, a wonder rises just off the shore. From the cold water, five pillars of purest salt break the surface of straits and extend toward the skies. Each year, on the ev of the winter solstice, the salty spires bend and reform– their finger and hand-like shape articulating a new gesture. Witnesses of this transformation describe it as animated and very humanoid-like action that emulates natural movement of fingers with surprising accuracy.

Sailors and fishing boats avoid the fingers entirely. Th superstitious see a great threat in the fingers and often point out that though the digits are smooth and elegant above the water, their structure below is twisted, cracked, and adorned with black mussels and stinging anemones. No soul has dived to see the fingers' origins and returned to the surface alive.

Though the fingers' relationship with the stars and constellations is confirmed, no astronomer has deciphered the larger meaning—the fingers have never repeated a configuration. Some believe the salt fingers are pointing to the position of the stars on the day the world ends.

For years, scholars, mystics, magicians, and priests performed a pilgrimage to the site in the dead of winter. A small tent city arose on the cold beach near the fingers. Speeches, sermons, and lesson were given freely to those who might listen. This pilgrimage has stopped in recent years, however, as a strange threat has taken over the region.

A particularly cruel and powerful pod of merfolk now controls the seas and the shores around the salt fingers. The warriors of this pod wear gruesome masks made from the decaying bodies of octopuses. They sink any ships that come within a few miles of the fingers. Their territory is marked by floating masses of kelp and the bodies of their victims. The kelp is woven into the dead flesh; locals refer to the merfolk as deep-stitchers. Their relationship with the salt fingers is unknown.

VIDIM, THE KINGDOM OF RAVENS

Ruler: Tsar Alexor Yodorovic (CN male human fighter 12), Protector of the Faithful, Keeper of the Runes, Master of the Nieder Straits, Guardian of the Shrines, and Father to the People

Important Personages: Princess Alyenka Alexoreva (LE female human); Princess Irina Alexoreva (LN female human); Ivosh Denobral (LG male human); Viryeshka Krasny (CG female ravenfolk); Chief Boyar Yaros Oshenko (CN male human); Master of the Huginn Ukwak (CN male ravenfolk)

Population: 54,500 (52,000 humans, 2,000 huginn, 500 dwarves)

Capital: Vidim, population 4,000 (3,900 humans, 100 huginn [ravenfolk])

City: Stalimisto, population 6,500

Towns: Urdengard, population 4,000 (3,000 human, 500 winterfolk, 300 centaurs, 200 ravenfolk); Bjornshafen, population 2,500 (2,100 human, 200 bearfolk, 100 trollkin); Jarshallen, population 2,300 (2,000 humans, 300 trollkin); Hugigrad, population 2,000 (1,800 humans, 200 ravenfolk)

Great Gods: Perun (patron of Vidim), Sif, Wotan, Baldur, Freyr and Freya

Trade Goods: Cattle, lumber, peat, flax, linen, leather, wheat, barley, apples

Perch of Huginn

The huginn of Vidim are a minority. They typically dwell in roosts at the outskirts of the towns and cities they occupy. The huginn build their roosts in the high reaches of these tall and crowded buildings, and they are generally tolerated by the human residents.

Within Vidim, a massive huginn roost has been built near the temple of Wotan. Though the locals have many names for it, this teetering edifice of poles, scaffolding, and fabric is most often called the Perch. Nearly a hundred huginn dwell in this labyrinthine place, where only the most agile and fearless have a chance to navigate its passages. The non-huginn residents of Vidim do not enter the Perch.

The interior of the Perch is a patchwork of wooden planks and supports that form multilevel chambers. Great pieces of rough and strong fabric are affixed to the exterior of these rooms to protect the inhabitants from the wind and the rain. These makeshift walls are in a constant state of disrepair, and their corners flap noisily in the frequent storms in the region. The poles, posts, and planks that form the rigid frame of the Perch are adorned with carved runes and eyes—the symbols of Wotan. Some of these carvings act as magical wards, and others serve as arcane sentries, which call out in the strange speech of the huginn when trespassers are found.

Adventures in Vidim

The most frequent adventures are conspiracies and secret missions for the tsar, though fights to defend the nation against black sorcery are also common.

- The tsar enthusiastically calls for participants in a grand contest. The challenge: Cull the burgeoning population of ice goblins in the hills near Vidim. The party and several mercenary groups compete to rout the goblin burrows. The heroes must face goblins, jealous and murderous boyars, and the cold climate. Upon returning to Vidim, the party finds the fickle tsar disinterested in their results.
- A scholar from Zobeck has arrived in Vidim with gold and intentions to see the salt fingers. The party is hired to escort the scholar to the site, where they are attacked by the merfolk. A cave entrance on the beach leads the party into a briny cave system where dark rites are performed.
- Princess Alyenka has arranged a meeting with one of Baba Yaga's daughters, who claims to have the cure for the tsar's madness. She requires heroes to fulfill the vila's surprising demand: conquer a nearby Thursir stronghold for the great witch to occupy.

The Perch is often the site of duels between the boyars, who resent the ravenfolk's presence, and the huginn, who struggle to respect the status of Vidim's ruling class. Though tensions are high between the huginn and the boyars, the Perch has never seen an outright attack. Its proximity to the temple and the Scarlet Palace prevent it from suffering vandalism, arson, or worse.

The Molting

Huginn who live in the Perch sometimes undergo a strange molting transformation. It begins with a thinning of the feathers around the shoulders and waist. These bare patches were first thought to be the beginning stages of a disease, but the theory was disproven when new feathers grew in. The replacement feathers appear at first in the traditional blue-black color, but very quickly begin to change hues. Fully grown in, the feathers appear either gilded or silvered—their strands glint in the light and give the huginn a decorated appearance.

Along with the gold and silver feathers, ravenfolk who experience this molting also dream of the Storm Court. One molted huginn claimed to know the location of the road to Valhalla; the first steps to the place appeared to him in a vivid dream. He wandered north and was not heard from again.

Why this molting occurs is not known. Some believe it is Wotan rewarding the huginn for their faithfulness. Others suggest it is Loki's trickery, though none can guess what the Lord of Deception's purpose for such transformation would be. The Doomcroakers shun the molted huginn and believe the attractive plumage is a cover for the dark gods' nefarious plots. The Doomcroakers are suspicious of the molted ones, who appear as dark spots in their powerful divining magic.

WANDERING REALM OF THE KARIV

A tabor is a both wagon and a household. It is the home of all Kariv wanderers, their warmth and shelter in the howling plains and bitter winter. The tabor of the Kariv are ever-moving, pushed forward at least once a season for fear of the Wandering Curse that all the Kariv suffer.

The Wandering Realm is the wide swath of land where the wagons roll, where sheep and horses graze, and where every matriarch is a queen to her clan. However, a few great Kariv stand out every year at the gatherings of the wagons, and these are hailed as the king and queens of the Kariv (rather than the king or queen of a clan). The holders of these titles change as various leaders grow older and sickly, or die on the road, or choose to step down. A bolder, slyer, or more charismatic contender might unseat the current monarch, but victory over an elder is never assured. Some of the Kariv's most cherished tales tell of King Jarek, the graybeard who outwits his loud, strutting rival Prince Isak, a fool who is nevertheless loved in his own way.

Do not ask of princes among the Kariv, for there is no clan leader born who is not the prince, duchess, boyar, o grandee of some title.

Iqbal Lovari, the Tall King

The king of the Kariv and leader of the Lovari clan is bot literally and figuratively larger than life. Iqbal Lovari is nearly 7 feet tall, reed-thin, and at nearly 70 years of age is still rumored to have "the strength of three bears." He is said to have both Northern giant and Southern fey ancestry. A master forger and warrior, he exemplifies al the qualities of his clan: he is cold and steely in his deali and fiery in battle.

Besides his lanky outline and laconic nature, he is eas identified by his one green eye and one blue eye, a mark of the Second Sight so common to his people. He is a traditionalist, staying true to the ancient Kariv saying: "The Kariv know no home . . . and acknowledge no masters but themselves." This makes him a dire enemy o Mama Rye and her clan.

Sanchari and Innessa, the Twin Queens

The strong-willed twin sisters Sanchari and Innessa are in their mid-40s and have together led their family for 1 years now, protecting their people against the influence of outsiders while walking among them. The sober Inne serves as Queen of the Road, making all the decisions regarding their family's travels while the flamboyant Sanchari rules as Queen of the Tents whenever the Kari have made camp.

The Kariv have no issue with these divided responsibilities. Nor does any Kariv bat an eyelash at th fact that the two sisters share the same body. They realiz outsiders wouldn't understand and consider the "sister insane, but the Kariv know she is not mad. Two minds a two souls reside inside in their queens' body.

What nobody knows, however, is that there is a third sister—sleeping, waiting . . . and far less benevolent.

The Kariv

Symbol: Varies by family, often birds, wheels, and barn animals

Ruler: King Iqbal Lovari (CN male human sorcerer 10) and Queens Sanchari and Innessa (each N female human bard 13)

Important Personages: Queens of the Dakat, Tria, Giessa, and Arina Dakat (each NG female human); Queen of the Galati and First Diviner of Zobeck, Mama Rye (N female human); King of the Heph, Master of 100 Devils Asirai Heph (NE male tiefling); Queen of the Leanti Mother Sage (N female human); Heavenly Empress Shirah Merceri (NG female human); Chief of the Sergin Marab Sergin (CG female human); King Kiril Kalder (NE male human); Mother Hapesh of the Barrels (CG female human)

Population: Approximately 120,000, though estimates range up to 180,000

Major Families: Dakat, Galati, Heph, Leanti, Lovari, Kalder, Merceri, Sergin

Great Gods: Svarog (patron), Hecate, Ninkash, Perun, Yarila and Porevit

Trade Goods: Horses, mules, fortunetelling, ironwork, tinsmithing, wool

The Throneless Kingdom

Iqbal Lovari, the Tall King of the Kariv and beloved leader of the Lovari Clan, is missing. His family searches for him to the east and north of Olersheim where he was last seen hunting, drinking, and negotiating with fur traders. Jacob Lovari, the firebrand grandson of the missing king, leads the effort to find Iqbal in the north. His camp is found at the feet of the mountains where he follows whatever leads he can find. The Lovari are desperate to find him, and while there is little evidence of treachery, some among them believe that his disappearance was plotted and planned by Clan Gallati. Among the most common accusation is that Mama Rye of Clan Gallati foresaw Iqbal's path would cross near the lair of a great white wyrm and worked to influence the silver traders to ensure the Tall King would meet his end in the beast's jaws. Tensions between the Lovari and Gallati families are high.

Adding to the ominous state of Kariv politics, the Gallati have produced a would-be successor to King Iqbal. Sanash the White Eye (LE female human warlock 6/wizard 4) is a young woman with alarming gifts in divination who was born into a noble family in Zobeck. She left her home to travel the Wandering Realm and meet with the many Kariv families who live there. Mama Rye is convinced that Sanash, born an albino, is destined to unite all the clans and bring redemption even to the Kalder, who sink ever more deeply into darkness. Sanash currently roams the Rothenian Plain with a large contingent of Zobeck mercenaries and brave Gallati warriors. She seeks to impress the other clans and is always happy to meet with those willing to assist her.

The Twin Queens are eager to have the king found. They assist Jacob Lovari with their magic and their coin. They have little regard for the upstart Galati diviner, whom they believe is under the influence of the Cloven Nine. As long as Sanash does not question the queens' authority, Sanchari and Innessa tolerate her roaming and portents. Should the young prophet move to claim power over the Kariv, the queens would surely stand in her way.

GREAT KARIV FAMILIES

The nation of the Kariv is split along clan and family lines, and only the king and queens of the Kariv are acknowledged by all the wandering folk. There are many families, but the most important are described here. Most clans consider other clans as equals, but occasionally a clan becomes famous (or infamous). These eight clans are celebrated in song and are rivals to the smaller or less well-known clans.

DAKAT, HORSE TRADERS

A medium-sized rising clan, Dakat currently has little standing, but it looks to increase its position and has had great success of late through treachery and clever dealings. The Dakats produce merchants and artisans, and Kariv who take to the adventuring life.

Three aged sisters, Tria, Giessa, and Arina Dakat, lead their separate families as the Queens of the Dakat. All three vote on issues concerning the clan, but Tria has the final word. They are found in the Magdar Kingdom and along the shores of the Ruby Sea.

Tria is desperate to find a cure for the black strangles since the strange disease has affected her clan's trading.

GALATI, FALLEN DIVINERS

The closest thing the Kariv have to royalty, this powerful clan's women are skilled diviners. The Kariv believe the Galati will produce the leader who unites the clans, breaks the Wander Curse, and leads them home. The Galati pact with Zobeck's Cloven Nine to enhance their skill as seers was heartbreaking for the Kariv, who feel their destiny is caged as long as the Galati remain bound to the Nine.

The matriarch Mama Rye, one of the most famed crab diviners (see the *Zobeck Gazetteer*) in the land, leads the Galati. They are the most common Kariv in the Ironcrags and Zobeck region.

The Galati generally support Sanash the White Eye's bid for rulership; Mama Rye can be very convincing. They believe the young diviner must prove her worth, and while they assist her as they can, the Galati do not want to appear too eager to interfere in Sanash's current attempts to win over the other clans.

HEPH, FALLEN DIABOLISTS

This small clan's bloodline carries a sorcerous taint that makes them skilled in summoning hellfire and bending the will of their enemies. Frequently referred to as the "horned Heph," the clan is shunned by all other Kariv for its eager entrance into pacts with the Cloven Nine in exchange for power. Unlike other Kariv, the Heph honor men over women and abolished the dominance of clan mothers.

Asirai Heph, reputedly more than 140 years old, bound a hundred minor devils to the various gemstones he wears to fuel his infernal powers and retain his hold on the clan.

The Heph are allies of the Master of Demon Mountain and are found there or in the area around Niemheim and Vidim. Some say they sell people to the gnomes.

LEANTI, BRAWLERS AND SINGERS

Famous wrestlers, jugglers, and brawlers, the Leanti are a loud family led by a brash young matriarch, Mother Sage. They are known for making castrati of prisoners and for praising song above most other arts; many Leanti are composers or bards, and their work is sought after as far away as Friula.

The Leanti stay north and east of the Ruby Sea most summers, and they winter in the Dragon Empire, one of the few Kariv families to spend time among the scaled folk. Many are expert pickpockets.

Mother Sage has learned of a song whose words have the power to transmute wood to silver. She searches the plain for the fey-folk who purportedly know the first verse.

LOVARI, THE SMITHS

The Lovari are the smiths, weaponeers, and tinkers of the Kariv, more welcome elsewhere than their brethren because of their skills with iron. Many masterwork weapons and tools in southern Midgard come from the forge wagons of the Lovari. These large, armored vardo are common at festivals and markets in the larger cities.

Doe-eyed Lovari maids and heavily muscled Lovari scions stage their famed Ironfire warrior dance with whirling blades, diaphanous skirts, and fiery torches. Lovari say the dance draws customers; rival merchants say it distracts spectators from the cutpurses working the crowds. In truth, it might be both. The Lovari wield the weapons they forge, and small bands of Lovari rakes hire out as bodyguards or mercenaries. They say Lovari need no coal, but their fires burn hot.

The Lovari are suspicious of Clan Galati, who they think had a direct hand in the disappearance of the Tall King.

MERCERI, THE BLESSED

This large clan is known for producing healers and consorting with angels and devas as far south as Ishadia. The Merceri pride themselves on their hospitality and frequently serve as arbiters in Kariv disputes, and they produce more diviners than all other Kariv clans combined.

The Heavenly Empress Shirah Merceri, a wizened seer who quickly discovers all hidden truths, leads the Merceri. The Queens of the Kariv, Sanchari and Innessa, were formerly leaders of the Merceri, though they now claim a higher title.

SERGIN, THE WOODSFOLK

This medium-sized clan is famed for its woodcraft, tracking, and skilled horsemanship. The Sergin clan

produces trackers and archers who are respecte
Kariv, dwarves, and centaurs alike for their kee
lightning reflexes.

Chief Marab Sergin, a fiery woman in her mi
known for her quick draw and even quicker ten
the clan. They are found near the Margreve and
Morgau and Doresh, as well as south, even into
Illyria and the edges of the Mharoti Empire.

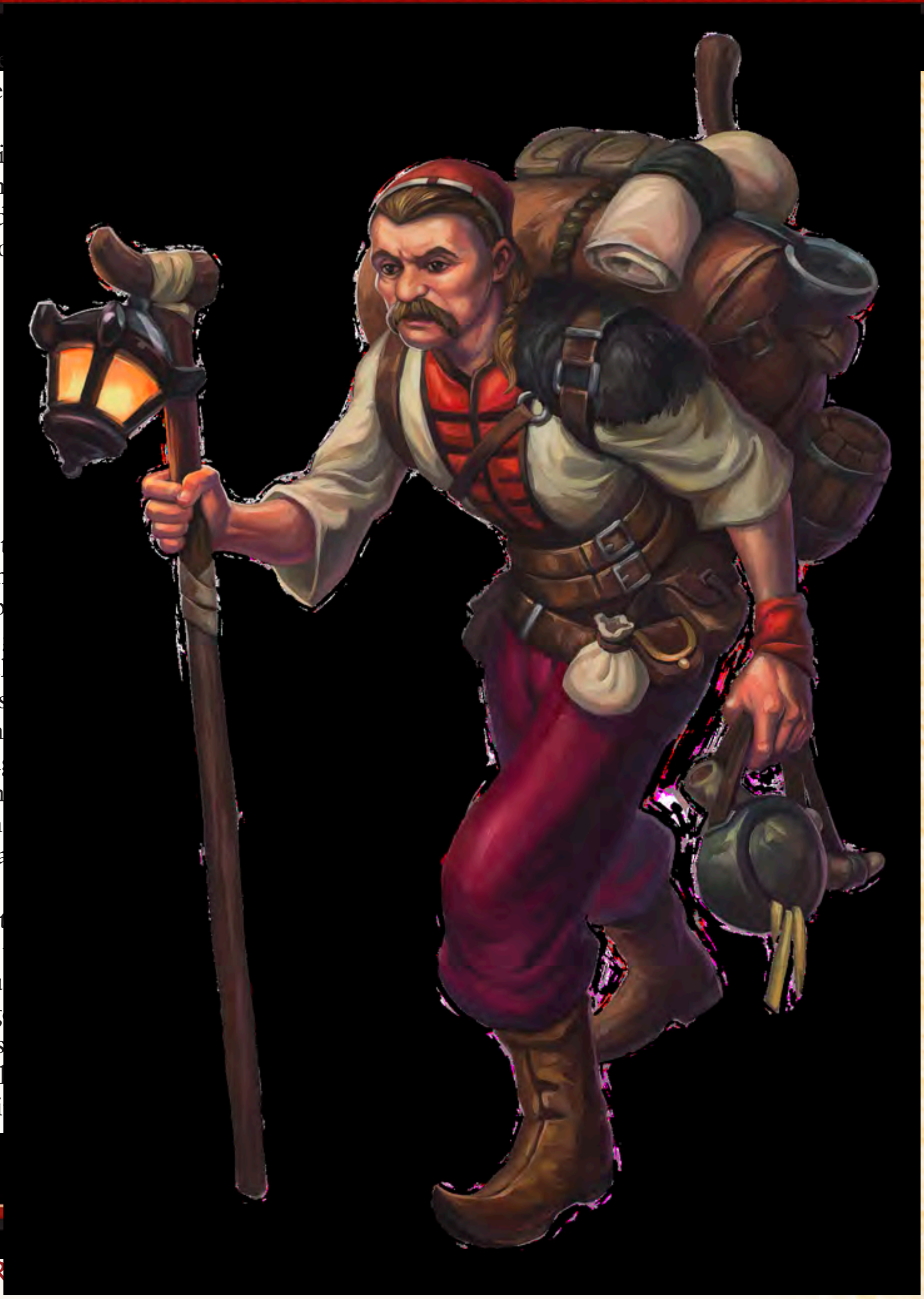
The Sergin family has seen the effects of the black strangles disease on the centaurs, and they now work to warn and raise the alarm about the centaur Long-Teeth among the other Kariv.

KALDER, THE CAULDRON KARIV

The tales say they are born from Baba Yaga's
cauldron. They are buried in the fall and left in t
earth in unmarked graves. Their names are rem
the fireside tales and cursed when mentioned b
The Kalder are the Kariv family that serves the
Niemheim, the child-stealers and maiden-catc
give the rest of the fallen a bad name. They are s
of Chernobog, protected by his dark angels, an
who spill their blood are stricken with a wastin
Their menfolk include ghouls and vampires; th
are sometimes tieflings or alchemists. Their kn
poisoned with that sticky black resin called Dra
Blood, and their smiles are few.

The Kalder might not be as bad as their reput
Sure, it is true that they travel to Krakovar and t
dwarfholds, and doing so means passing throu
Holmgard and the gnome forests. It's simple g

But they are no more servants to the gnomes
are to the Tsar of Vidim or Perun's Daughter. T
keep to themselves as masters of black and whi



KARIV TABOOS AND SUPER

As might be expected of such a mystical people, the Kariv believe in numerous superstitions and taboos. Some of these are based in ancient wisdom while others are born of rampant superstition. Taboos and superstitions differ among clans, but the following are the most common.

Black Dogs: Never look a black dog directly in the eye, for to do so means death. When one Kariv wishes ill on another, he drapes the pelt of a black dog near his sleeping target or nails one to his target's wagon. Kariv believe that wicked people are dragged to hell by Old Gnash, an immense black dog who feasts on souls.

Bloodsworn Oaths: Words are meaningless, but when precious Kariv blood is spilled as part of an oath, the oath must never be broken or else that Kariv is forever cast out from the clan. Further, the one who kept the oath is honor-bound to slay the oathbreaker.

Clan Horses: Clans treat their horses as valued brothers and sisters and never intentionally place them in harm's way. Allowing a horse to die or face injury without attempting to intervene or—worse—to save themselves from death or injury subjects the Kariv's entire family to death or identical injury, as decided by the clan.

Dead Bodies: Corpses are unclean and must never be touched with bare flesh.

Rover's Burden: This ancient code requires the Kariv to heal, care for, feed, or take in anyone found on the road who needs help, even if that person is an enemy to the Kariv. Injured enemies found on the road must be tended to until well, and then challenged honorably.

and queens of seduction. The only gift they lack is that of fortunetelling; some say they traded it to the other families in exchange for a talent for necromancy.

Believe the story you love best—perhaps all are true. The Kalder are led by King Kiril Kalder, a man with an eye for extortion, blackmail, and secrets. His supporters and lieutenants are largely arcanists and priests of dark gods.

THE THIN TRAIL

Out in the reaches of the Wandering Realm, past the common camps of the Kariv and the centaur tents, the Thin Trail lies in the least-traveled regions of the eastern Rothenian Plain. The trail is said to be older than Baba Yaga, which might place it at the beginning of the world. Indeed the old crone avoids it, and those who ask her about it are often turned into chairs. The origin of the trail remains unknown, but the few who return from their adventures on the trail speak of a shifting path the color of smoke. Ash rises from the dark grass beside the trail, and to stand inside the limits of the trail and look out is to see a vision of the plain as a charred wasteland. On the horizon, one can see monstrous leviathans moving slowly against a red sky. Step off the trail, and the vision is gone.

To find the Thin Trail, you must first go east across the plain until you find a tall hill with four trees atop it. In the center of the trees, you must burn something precious to you and then consume the ashes. Having done this, you might spy a hint of the trail from the hilltop. The trail has no beginning and no end, but rather it traces a maddening pattern across the land. Baba Yaga has seen its shape in the moonlight as she flew overhead, and in it found something that scared even her.

The Kariv believe that the Kalder know the shape and power of the trail. Often, when a wicked winter storm blows across the plain from the east, the Kariv spit in the snow and curse the Kalder, whose traipsing along the trail must be the cause of the blizzard.

CURSE OF THE KARIV

The Wander Curse, the bane of the Kariv, is a burden they seem to bear lightly: after all, are they not beautiful dancers? Does not their laughter echo loudly off the walls of lesser, settled folk? Are they not the cleverest of horse-traders, and the boldest of lovers? Surely it is so!

And yet, when the fires die down to embers and the shadows close in, the Kariv show their dark side. They drink and whore and gamble, the women as much as the men. They take chances that invariably lead to trouble; they cheat and lie to the Gadscho, their term for any who are not Kariv. And before the seasons turn, no matter how sweet the pastures or how warm the feather beds of a friendly host-town, they move on.

The Kariv travel because they must. Their curse is one from the fey and the Green Gods, some say the result of a Kariv king's betrayal of an oath to the gods. Or perhaps it is the result of a bad bargain struck with Baba Yaga—storytellers disagree on the details. What is crystal clear is that Kariv men and women who do not pull up stakes and move at least a few day's ride every few months grow infertile and their line ends. The fortunetelling families cannot abide the thought. The proud, doting Kariv fathers and strict mothers have no patience for such a fate. And so they live on the road.

It's unclear whether any Kariv can lift the curse and whether they would stop wandering if they did. Travel is part of who they are, and many enjoy the yearly round from one hamlet to the next, through the summer trade fairs and horse sales, to the winter lager and the spring foaling at the same place. The oldest Kariv sometimes stop and settle down for a marriage, for a title, or for some other reason. But they never found a lineage once they do, and those whose wagons have stopped are shunned by those who still pull the vardos ever onward.

THE ARRID

Kariv who cease to wander suffer the curse's cruel effects. These sad people are shunned by the others, who continue to pull their vardos and set their eyes on the horizon. The Kariv call them the Arrid, and they mourn them as if they had died. The Arrid suffer from both physical and mental afflictions. First the spirit wanes; the Kariv heart, so full of song and passion, loses its vitality—robbing the Arrid of their optimism and aspirations. Next, their clothing and material goods lose all color, their bright sashes fading to dull grays and browns. The last effect of the curse sees the Arrid barren and infertile. No lineage is possible for the Kariv who stop wandering.

In the far-flung reaches of the Wandering Realm are small communities of Arrid, who live together in sad huts. These small bands of curse victims fall to dark thoughts and inevitably to acts of evil. The fallen nomads gather around greasy pots and consort with black-hearted fiends who lure them into servitude with a promise to restore what they have lost.

Sanash the White Eye claims to have seen a way to restore the Arrid, in a waking dream. She says that should an Arrid agree to take a thousand steps wearing the shoes of a young Kariv in love, their dark thoughts would brighten, and they could resume their wandering again. Most Kariv doubt this claim, though Sanash's most devoted followers believe it possible.

THE CLOUD-SOAKED CLIFF

In the hills north of the Wandering Realm and south of the Jotunheim Mountains, a cliff overlooks a glacial trail. Upon this cliff, with its majestic and sweeping view, sits the sacred forge of the Lovari family. The Cloud-Soaked Cliff, so named for the white clouds of the mountains that often dip and encircle the cliff, is a sacred place to the Kariv smiths. There they have built a massive forge, and cleared a large area to serve as the foundation for a temporary temple to Svarog built anew at the end of each summer.

The Lovari perform a pilgrimage to the cliff top each year, carrying ore, tools, coal, and water. The temple's structure is built from wooden logs dragged up the cliff by teams of decorated horses. Its walls are made of bright red silk, brought in rolls in the back of painted wagons. It takes two days to build the temple, and afterward a tremendous celebration (known as Svarnesh) is held, with guests invited from across the plain and beyond. To participate in this celebration is to see the true heart of the Kariv—wild, passionate, and superstitious.

After the celebration, the forge is lit and work begins. Weapons, implements, tools, and all manner of metal crafts are made as the anvils of the Lovari sing from atop the cliff. It is said that every so often, Svarog himself hears the hammers ringing and blesses the work, imbuing the object with his strength and magic. After a week of work, the temple is taken down and the goods are transported away to be traded at distant markets—though the smiths are careful to leave the finest work as an offering to Svarog, which is thrown over the cliff into the ice and snow.

The Wandering Bazaar

Deep in Kariv territory, circling a small lake fed by a tributary of the Tanais River, the wagon stalls of the Wandering Bazaar trade strange goods with brave souls. The market has no fixed configuration and moves every few days, re-establishing itself with minimal conflict. The stalls are mostly run by Kariv families, but any good-hearted merchant willing to walk the shores of Ingot Lake is welcome. Trade caravans to and from the bazaar are common, especially in the spring when a great fishing competition is held—the winner taking home a tidy sum of gold.

The merchant master of the Wandering Bazaar is Ama Tidefan, a shrewd but good-spirited 50-year-old Kariv woman. Ama is responsible for overseeing the market, ensuring the stalls do not sell ill-gotten or evil goods. She is a fair bargainer, but she uses her powerful skills of persuasion to skew agreements to the benefit of the merchant collective. The collective hires mercenary guards, pays to spread the word of the market abroad, and builds and repairs the wagons.

Most equipment can be bought in the Wandering Bazaar. The merchants enjoy haggling, and they consider vigorous bargaining to be part of the bazaar's culture. They typically trade items for coin but are amenable to trading goods for goods. PCs with a background related to mercantilism or trade have advantage on Charisma checks to negotiate prices at the market. Additionally, sellers may offer special prices to heroes who have some renown in the region.

Opening a Stall

For 500 gold, anyone may open a stall in the Wandering Bazaar. There, they may sell anything they wish, provided it does not bring trouble to the market. Adventuring parties might cooperate to sell a variety of goods they make during downtime with their profession or turn items found on their adventures into profit. Running a stall requires it be staffed, either by the owner or a paid employee.

Hidden Treasures

The wagons of the Wandering Bazaar are stuffed full of goods from all over Midgard. For the right price, nearly anything can be bought in the traveling market. Spend enough time rooting through the tables and shelves of the sellers, and you may even discover magical treasure sold by the ignorant or desperate. Be careful not to show too must interest if you should find such an item; the seller may become resistant to parting with it, or worse, come back to claim it.

Kariv justice, retrieve the ore, and deliver it to the Cloud-Soaked Cliff for the Lovari celebration.

- Sanesh the White Eye requires heroes to slay a small band of Kalder living in a valley of twisted trees and crumbled stones. The Kalder have been kidnapping members of a nearby Mercedi family encampment, and Sanesh wishes to impress a Mercedi matriarch. The prophet offers a chest of gold as a reward.
- In the giant-infested hills south of the Jotunheim Mountains, Jacob Lovari has found his grandfather's trail. The truth of Iqbal's disappearance is revealed, but not before the heroes must face an ancient and icy scaled horror in its frozen lair.

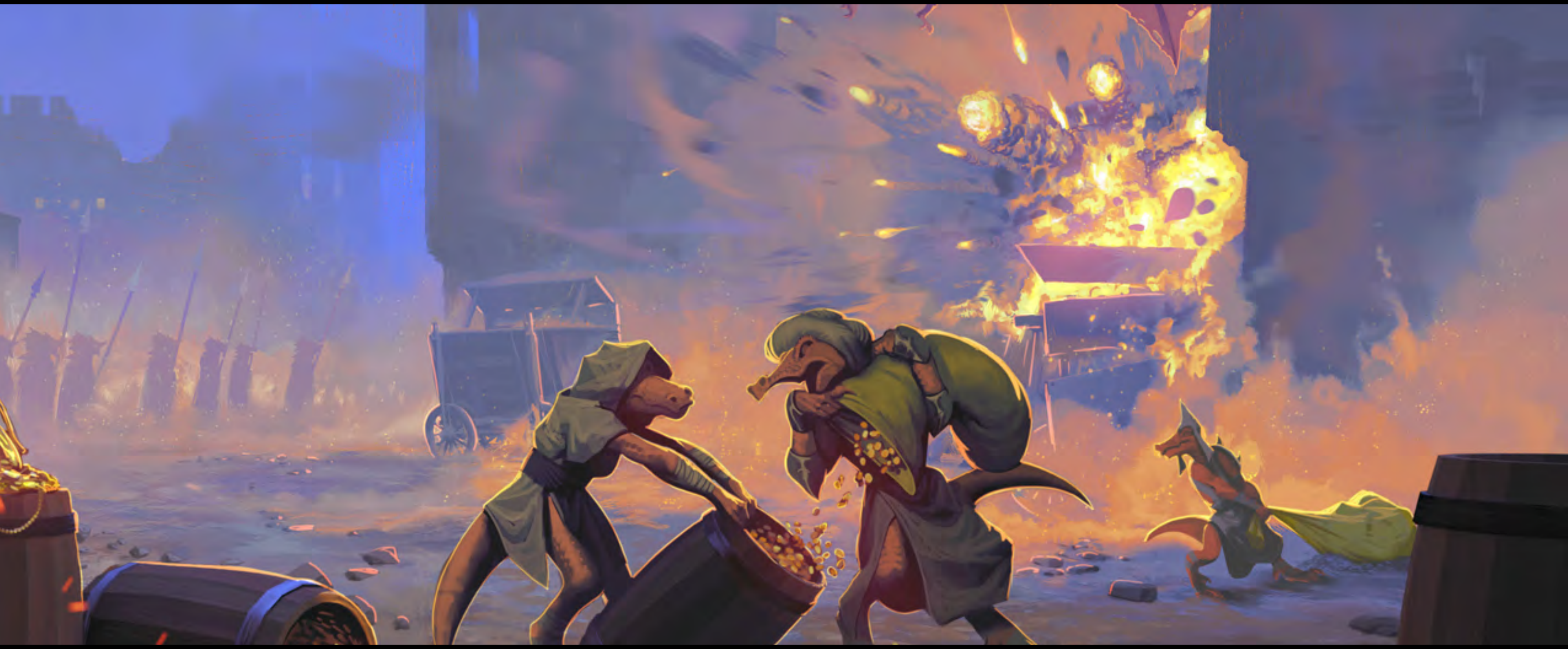
DRAGON EMPIRE AND EASTERN LANDS

5

When the dragons decided to join together to plunder their neighbors, they changed the world. The Dragon Empire maintains a policy of perpetual war under all sultans and sultanas. This has led to great conquests and occasionally hideous losses since the dragonfolk have stretched their borders far enough that they must defend enormous provinces from Nuria Natal and Khandiria—two major nations of great power and antiquity—and against a handful of motivated smaller kingdoms that have banded together to face the threat. This bothers the Dragon Lords very little, for their fire and their claws remain as sharp as ever.

LANDS OF THE DRAGONCOIL

The lands of the Dragoncoil Mountains and its lowlands along the Middle Sea are another world compared to the fertile forests and mountains of the North. They are rich in trade, ancient in magic, and dominated by a vast draconic empire—and by the god-kings of Nuria and the grasping priests of Ishadia before that. Their strange magic and their control of valuable trade routes makes



the dragonfolk rich and powerful, and their schools of learning are in many ways more advanced than those of the Seven Cities or the Crossroads.

In the parched lands of the east, the thralls and subjects of the Mharoti Empire cheer the annual march of the sultan's dragon-mounted legions, even as they fear its assassins and ruthless tax collectors. Once a year, the sultan's decree urges the nobility to put aside its endless feuding to conquer new lands under the banners of the Fire Monks and Wind Priests of the Four Elemental Temples. The various lords, lordlings, and emirs ride mighty wyrms and drakes to war, supported by fearsome fire giants, the tusked ogrekin of Kaa'nesh, and eunuch sorcerers of the Eastern Rites of Azuran. The hunger of their draconic patrons never ceases, and their greed drives never-ending campaigns to gather slaves, wealth, and new lands. Worship of dark gods such as Mammon and Vardesain is a constant since dragons are surely as prone to corruption and temptation as humans.

All this striving has led to wealth and power growing as inevitably as an avalanche in the high passes. Gold and silver trickle through the empire like rivers. The Mharoti Empire's cities and tent towns host magnificent bazaars, crowded with thieves and criminals. Caravans connect the kobold folk with the markets

Kobaldi excel at looting cities raided by the dragon empire's mighty armies.

of the Southlands, and ambassadors of a hundred nations seek the sultan's blessings in the courts of Harkesh.

The empire's people are proud, yet they show hints of hubris, religious zealotry, and even signs of faltering bloodlines and decay. Debauched cultists beholden to strange gods kidnap unwary travelers to sacrifice to great fiery Baal or to local cults such as V'ashra the Tormentor or Forty-Fingered Nakresh. The cults of Nuria seep across its borders, and the peculiar gods of the East are present in the empire as well, particularly four-faced Azuran. Paladins, monks, and sects of every breed preach loudly, beg quietly, and fight in the streets. Unrest among the priesthood has toppled more than one sultan. Baal's mouth is ever hungry, seeking sacrifices and taxes for the empire's further glory.

So visit the thousand stalls in the Grand Bazaar of Harkesh, raid the caravans stuffed with gold, carpets, and fragrant spices, or leave the empire to climb the Sky Stairs of Beldestan—ten thousand mysteries of mountain and desert abound in the Dragon Empire and its vast surrounding lands!

ORIGINS OF THE MHAROTI EMPIRE

The lands of the Dragoncoil Mountains have always been infested with drakes, wyrms, and wyverns—they give the mountains their name. But about 400 years ago, one especially cunning red dragon by the name of Mharot decided he was tired of working so hard to steal golden treasures from humans and dwarves and then being forced to continually guard those treasures. He proposed a pact to neighboring dragons, and he accepted the standing offers from kobold tribes to give their whole-hearted allegiance to the dragons in exchange for protection. With the patronage of the dragon gods and the aid of its elemental sorcery, the empire has grown great indeed.

It is difficult to adequately describe the depth and exotic confusion of the Mharoti Empire. Many of its cities are more populous than entire nations in the North, and they display great ambitions and contradictions. The Dragon Empire seeks to expand, to garner tribute from subject nations, and to bring the word of its elemental gods to a wider world. It has expanded quickly in just a few centuries, backed by dragon fire and claws.

The Mharoti Empire is one of the few places where humans and their kin are distinctly second-class citizens. The dragons' vanity was such that they could never agree on a dragon ruler, so they gave the job to a clearly inferior human or dragonkin instead. Until quite recently, the Dragon Empire was ruled by a human man or woman who loosely held the reins of power. Five years ago, one of the dragonkin declared that the human ruler's corruption led to the empire's battlefield failures—and took the reins of power for himself and his family.

DRAGONKIN AND DRAGONBORN

The vast profusion of scaled races often confuses the hairy jambuka, or at least those from outside the peaceful bounds of the empire. The term "dragonkin" is used by the Mharoti to refer to the scaled races as a whole: kobolds, drakes, and dragonborn primarily, but also lizardfolk and even wyverns and dracotaurs. The term "dragonborn" refers specifically to the large scaled race that serves as the empire's heavy troops, officers, and lesser nobles.

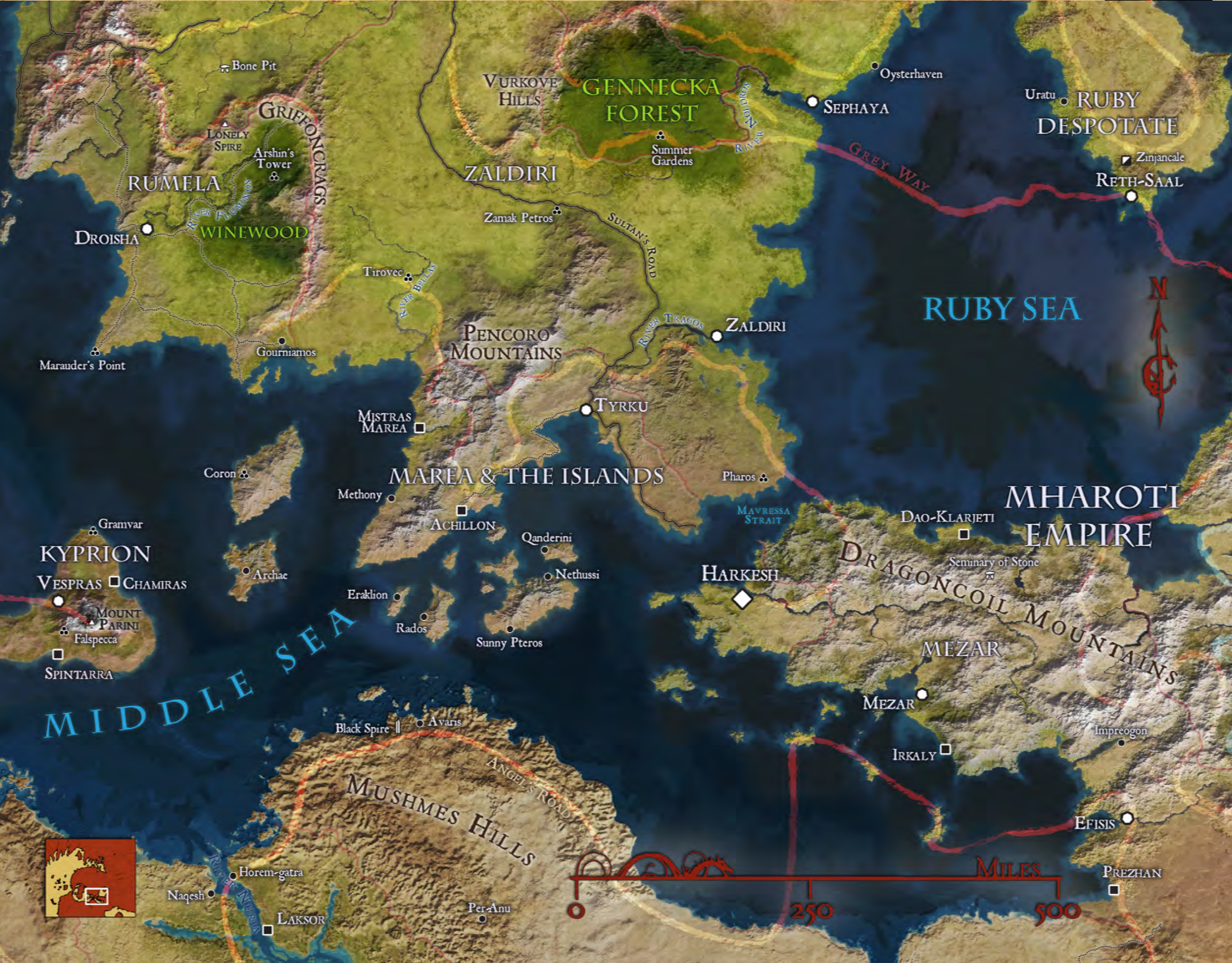
Recent History of the Empire

Seven year ago, the armies of the Dragon Empire conquered the mountains and valleys of Illyria, annexing it as the empire's newest province, Rumela. In addition, the swift-flying Mharoti legions killed King Stephanos of the Magdar Kingdom and his eldest son at the Battle of Marroc's Field where the northern Knights of the Undying Sun almost cut the imperial army in two. Much glory went to the war wyverns that tore apart the battle wagons of the Magdar, though others claim kobold alchemy filled the field with choking mists (both are likely true).

With the conquest secured, the Mharoti are patiently rooting out all opposition and have brought tens of thousands of kobold settlers to turn the land to productive use. Digesting such a large swath of terrain takes time, but the dragonkin have time aplenty and many nimble claws to work the land, pile high stones, and improve the roads over the passes. Their work is steady, honorable, and seemingly endless.

Six years ago, the Mharoti Admiral of the Western Fleet, Tolga Serkhan al-Harkeshi, lost his entire Mharoti fleet in a huge naval engagement against Triolo, Kyprion, and their allies. Worse news followed a year later, where the dragonkin lost a major engagement with Ishadia and Khandiria. During the Battle of Wheeling Angels, a powerful celestial summoner rained holy fire on several true dragons, knocking them from the sky while vast number of Khandirian oliphaunts and juggernauts overran the Mharoti gnolls, edjet, and kobold levies.

When word came in of the battle on the heels of the Battle of Seggotan's Tears (which the Triolans call the Battle of the Golden Wave), the empire convulsed with the news of the death of tens of thousands and the annihilation of an entire dragon legion in the east. Moving quickly, three army generals staged a coup against Sultana Azrabahir. The sultana's elite palace guards—the Order of the Wyvern—fell quickly in line, not questioning her usurpation, and the sultana barely escaped the coup. She fled on dragonback to Marea, where friends helped her bolt to exile in the Republic of Valera in the Seven Cities. There she sought shelter with young Emperor Loki, who surprisingly took her in. Her replacement as ruler was for the first time


Bone Pit
Griffoncrags
Lonely Spire
Arshin's Tower
Rumela
River Fluminos
Winewood
Droisha
Vurkove Hills
Gennecka Forest
River Noldros
Summer Gardens
Zaldiri
Zamak Petros
Sultan's Road
Oysterhaven
Sephaya
Uratu
Ruby Despotate
Zinjancale
Reth-Saal
Grey Way
Ruby Sea
N
Tirovec
River Bellas
Marauder's Point
Gourniamos
Pencoro Mountains
River Tragos
Zaldiri
Tyrku
Mistras Marea
Coron
Marea & the Islands
Methony
Achillon
Pharos
Mavressa Strait
Mharoti Empire
Dao-Klarjeti
Seminary of Stone
Dragoncoil Mountains
Harkesh
Gramvar
Kyprion
Vespras
Chamiras
Mount Parini
Falspecca
Spintarra
Archae
Qanderini
Nethussi
Eraklion
Rados
Sunny Pteros
Mezar
Mezar
Impreogon
Irkaly
Middle Sea
Black Spire
Avaris
Angel's Road
Mushmes Hills
Efisis
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Naqesh
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[redacted]

Al-Stragul—or as he prefers to style himself, the Dread Sultan. His two co-conspirators disappeared.

The new sultan is a break with the past: a dragonborn "new prince" has claimed divine sanction for his coronation, and a new Age of Scales. So far, Nuria has not taken action against the Mharoti, but it is probably not a bad time for the god-kings to consider it. Nuria is expanding its trade with Capleon, and priests of Thoth-Hermes are in the forefront of forging these new connections. At the same time, the Emerald Order (see *Demon Cults & Secret Societies*) is expanding its influence in the Seven Cities, sending scouts to the Magdar Kingdom, and making overtures in Zobeck.

Even the empire's victory in Rumela is not unopposed. Triolo's minotaur corsairs battle against the Dread Sultan's fleets as red-sailed pirates while the bandits of the White Mountain Marches and the ghost folk of the mysterious White Goddess raid deep into Rumela.

With long borders to defend and many enemies, the dragons may have reached the boundaries of their power—though few would bet against them. Somehow the Dragon Empire fights against the Magdar Kingdom, Ishadia, and Nuria Natal while at the same time grappling with the enormous Empire of Khandiria to the east. Having dragons among its legions is a great advantage, surely, but perhaps its claws seek to sweep too many treasures into its grasp. The Mharoti people—from its tiniest kobolds and most ragged humans to the mightiest gem-encrusted vizier and sagest dragon-prince—all believe in the legends of their greatness and in their kinship with Veles the World-Serpent, the Maker of All Things. Surely the dragons who rule are made in his image, and they are fated to rule the world? Such confidence is infectious, and the Mharoti legions fight harder and march faster knowing that the blessings of the dragon gods shine on them and their cause.

[redacted]

The Mharoti are known for their affinity for elemental magic, and these elements are reflected in the ley lines that thread up and down the valleys of the Dragoncoil Mountains. Wizards and sorcerers refer to fire lines and ice lines as especially common but fleeting while stone lines and ocean lines are more enduring. The most powerful mountain-peak nodes and the coiling magic of updraft ley lines are best left to those who can fly and cast magic at the same time. When you are describing ley lines here, consider elemental effects as being more common than elsewhere.

The Mharoti refer to shadow roads and fey roads as

[redacted]

dragonkin of Capleon have been driven out or killed by a jambuka mob, and the temple and priesthood of Seggotan were torn apart or banished—and the sultan finds this an intolerable insult. He invaded the island of Kyprion and holds a single town taken from the minotaurs, but the great empire simply lacks the ships for a larger invasion and conquest. For now, the empire has a wide choice of enemies and prepares its next strike.

THE DREAD SULTAN

The newest ruler of the Mharoti Empire, the scarred and cunning Dread Sultan Ozmir Al-Stragul, is a general of great skill and a politician of utter ruthlessness. He deposed the young human Sultana Casmara Azrabahir and ousted his partners; his ruthlessness made him sultan, and he intends to hold the title and create even greater victories for Mharot and the dragonfolk in years to come. He chafes at current setbacks, but for the moment he must raise new armies and rebuild the fleets.

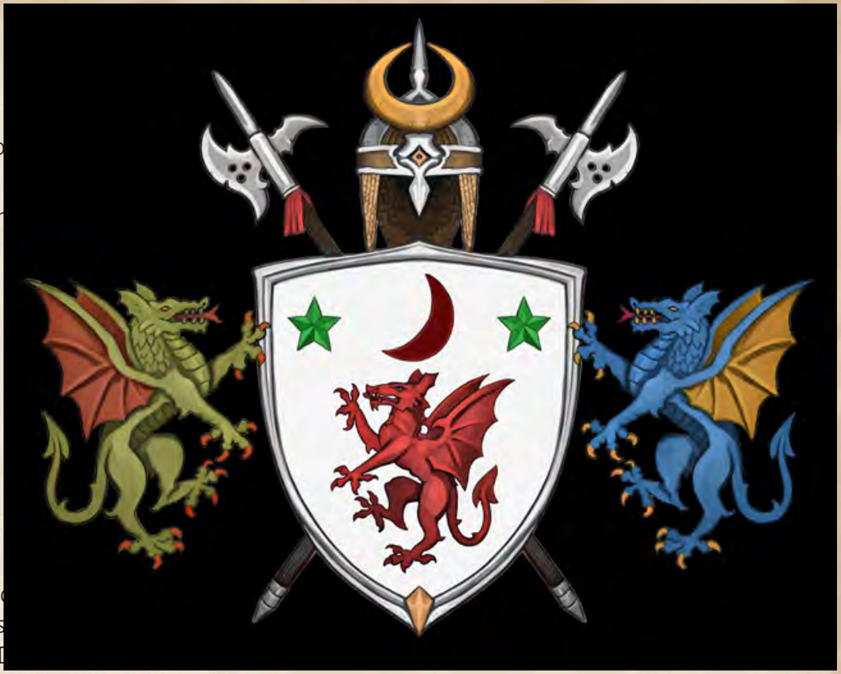
On a day-to-day level, the sultan administers the executive office of the Mharoti Compact: appointing judges and decreeing laws, bestowing and stripping titles from the nobility, and granting land and privileges to the morza, a term translated from the Draconic as "prince" or "dragon governor" or "great lord." He collects the taxes, distributes bread and tribute, raises and leads the armies (or chooses the general who does), and makes everyone cooperate. His assassins threaten dragonkin and human satraps who fail to toe the line. His command of the armies gives him leverage against any individual great lord, though the morza remain independent powers to a large degree. And most of all, the sultan looks out for the empire as a whole.

If the sultan didn't exist, the empire would not be an empire—it would more closely resemble eight draconic kingdoms at war. Dread Sultan Al-Stragul has a great deal of power but only because the governors don't trust any of their own number with that much authority. And yet, he seems able to plan effectively and to command the morza and the imperial legions. His rule depends on turning military failure into conquest, and he has shown the ruthlessness needed to grind Illyrian resistance into dust—while ignoring the fact that the conquest was the work of his predecessor, whom he claimed had lost the blessings of Azuran and the dragon gods.

MHAROTI GOVERNMENT

The Mharoti Empire is a draconic empire: founded by dragons, run by dragons for their enrichment, vastly powerful, and focused around the scaly races, not humans. If you put dragons in charge, they say that's exactly the way it always should have been. But once you put dragons in charge, they will never leave. Mharoti humans might be perversely proud of being from the richest, strongest, and wisest land of Midgard. But they're also a little . . . uneasy, because it's not a human realm.

MHAROTI EMPIR



Symbol: A red dragon rampant on a field o with a red crescent and two green stars

Ruler: Dread Sultan Ozmir Al-Stragul (NE dragonborn fighter 14), Lord of the Legions, Greatest of Warriors, Master of the Ocean Waves, Marshall of the Clouds and Breezes, and Keeper of the Empire's Secrets

Dragon Lords: Ateshah, the Heart of the Desert (NE male ancient fire [red] dragon); Glauvistus the Scourge (CE female adult flame dragon); Ibbalan the Illustrious (LE male ancient undead gold dragon); Lashmaraq Talshah (LE female adult fire [red] dragon); Mharot the Foun (LN male ancient fire [red] dragon); Parsis (N adult male gold dragon); Rüzgar, the and Hungers (NE adult male cave dragon); Satarah al-Beldestani (NE female star drake); Yiraz Azah (LG female ancient wind dragon)

Important Personages: Kah-Vizier Zeki Hasan Al-Eski, personal diviner and keeper of the treasury for the sultan (LE male human); Vorel, Mistress of the Royal Harem and Spymaster (LG female adult silver dragon); Basha General Azladdan ir-Rahullah, war-cleric and commander of the Windrider Legion (LN male dragonborn); Lord Marsan Cogalu, Commander of the Order of the Wyvern (NE male dragonborn); Hasibe al-Harkeshi, High Priestess of Baal (LN female dragonborn); Yavuz al-Prezhan, High Priest of Veles (N male dragonborn); Enver Demir Al-Kaa'Nesh, the Firespeaker of Mharot (LE male human); General Stalek al-Grodoccor, king of the giants (LE male fire giant); Storros the Sea Sage (N male dragon turtle); Her Highness Zukzorana the Fifth, kobold queen of queens (N female kobold); Jabbir the Herald (CN male fey drake); Ambassador-Elementalist Aban (NE male dragonborn), His Sanguine Magnificence, Kan Ulkan (CE male human [blood mage, see Appendix or *Deep Magic*])

Population: 48,000,000 (19,500,000 dragonkin, 13,500,000 humans, 14,000,000 kobolds, 180,000 dwarves, 100,000 gnolls, 50,000 ogres, 18,000 drakes [various], 12,000 giants [various], 6,000 gnomes, 500 dragons [various])

Imperial Capital: Harkesh, population 367,000 (115,000 dragonkin, 84,000 humans, 126,000 kobolds, 42,000 other)

Provincial Capitals: Sarkland [Gizmiri province], population 42,000; Droisha [Rumela province], population 35,500; Zaldiri, population 27,000; Efesis [Mezar province winter capital], population 15,000; Mezar [Mezar province summer capital], population 14,000; Kalpostan, population 11,000; Tabur [Hariz province], population 8,000; Tyrku [Marea province], population 6,000; Ashadar [Betik province], population 4,000

Cities: Qiresh, population 146,000; Prezhan, population 90,000; Irkaly, population 88,000; Achillon, population 60,000; Mistras Marea, population 55,000; Kaa'nesh, population 25,000; Cogelu, population 21,000; Uqmal, population 16,000; Dao-Klarjeti, population 12,000; Kruja, population 8,000; Parszan, population 8,000

Towns: Valogrod, population 5,000; Impreogon, population 4,000; Kazan, population 3,000; Methony, population 2,500; Eraklion, population 2,000; Rados, population 1,500

Great Gods: Azuran, Baal, Khespotan, Seggotan, Veles

Trade Goods: Iron, carpets, silk, saffron, pepper, silver, jewels, red and blue dyes, perpetual lanterns, compasses, books and scrolls, ivory, pearls, hunting birds, lizards, falcons

Humans are the underclass among the Mharoti. They are mostly farmers, militia, miners, artisans on occasion, and sometimes servants among the nobles. But they are not members of the ruling castes, with one great exception. The Sultanate and the system of human and dragonkin viziers and satraps was put in place because dragons considered it a tiresome administrative chore to run an empire and because none of the dragons could trust the others to rule fairly. These humans were the public face of the empire to human kingdoms, and the sultan's relatives were its diplomats, messengers, and figureheads.

The recent elevation of a dragonkin to the post of the Dread Sultan seems to the dragons of the realm very little of a fuss (it's still not one of them in charge, which is what matters). To the jambuka of the empire, though, it is a bit chilling to see the scaled folk seize another office and position of authority. Combined with the rapacious new taxes levied by Kah-Vizier Zeki Hasan Al-Eski to fund the sultan's new fleets and armies and greater demands from the provincial morza for conscripts, levies, and work gangs, the lower classes of the empire are feeling the pinch of the empire's greatness.

The ruling classes are all dragons and dragon-derived. Dragons are at the top of the social pyramid as the noble houses of the morza and their dependents. The provincial governors are essentially dukes, each with a private army of thousands or tens of thousands, plus younger dragons (princes and barons), drakes (landed gentry and overseers), dragonborn (the sekban, edjet, timarli, and landless knights and priests), and kobolds (merchants and traders) under them.

In the Dragon Empire, you know where you stand in the social order. People see it in your face.

Draconic Nomenclature and Identification

Identifying dragon types and breeds is difficult in the empire; some hybrid types exist, and outside observers often misidentify metallic, chromatic, and elemental dragons. Wind, silver, and gold dragons may be confused for one another, as are red dragons and flame dragons. Most other types are readily understood, though Mharoti kobaldi and others recognize a wide range of additional identifiers, such as white-bellied wind dragons and azure-bellied wind dragons, or orange-sparked flame dragons and blackscale flame dragons. These finer points may matter for status and bragging rights among the morza but do not otherwise come into play beyond their use as identifiers (similar to the way hair color identifies various jambuka).

Soldiers and Nobles

Because the Mharoti are conscious of their place in the social order, matters of status and pedigree matter as much as skill and achievement. Following are the eight basic classes or levels of the empire. It is possible to move between the social ranks, but most Mharoti never do.

The ranks of the empire—in increasing rank and status—are the jambuka, kobaldi, sekban, edjet, akinji, timarli, urmanli, and morza. Above them all stand only the sultan himself, and Mharot, the Founder sleeping in his distant valley.

Jambuka, the Jackals

At the bottom of the Mharoti social pyramid are the humans, dwarves, ogres, gnolls, giants, and all other unscaled races, collectively referred to by the dragonfolk as jambuka (literally, "jackals"). Despite this somewhat offensive collective name, any unscaly creature is welcome to live under the sultan's rule, and humans have a certain role to play as peasants, administrators, and servants (and to be entirely clear, the morza think of the sultans and sultanas as the most exalted and valued of servants). A great many jambuka are miners in the Dragoncoil Mountains, and the farmers who feed them. The jambuka are taxed and otherwise left alone to work, live, and carry on the business of running the empire. Dragons and dragonkin think the jambuka should show a little more gratitude for all that they gain as minor-but-still-legitimate citizens of the empire.

That said, the jambuka are not slaves, and some are not serfs or peasants. They thrive as smugglers, bandits, and dealers in flesh and drugs. They run gambling halls frequented by their scaly betters, and they find employment in a thousand dishonorable trades: as moneylenders, extortionists, assassins, musicians, actors, street sweepers, eggnappers, mercenary troops, alchemists, butchers, tanners, shepherds, thugs, night soil collectors, and stable hands. The jambuka might not rule in the Mharoti Empire but that does not mean they are powerless. Their connections and loyalties are tighter for being tested by the ruling scaled folk.

Kobaldi, the Workers

The teeming masses of Mharoti kobolds—kobaldi in Draconic—do much of the same work as the unscaled folk with one important distinction: they are scaled folk, and thus superior citizens of the empire. They rarely let the human folk forget their inferior status in the empire and always make a point of their draconic blood and their "close, personal" ties to some important personage. Kobold weavers and miners are especially skilled and control most of these guilds throughout the empire.

In war, the kobolds are archers, sappers, engineers, and massed light infantry. They fight with great devotion, though perhaps to little effect except through weight of numbers.

A Typical Mharoti Army

The empire formulaically refers to its "20 victorious legions and 5 fleets" when discussing military matters, and most scaled folk know better than to ask for details. The actual count stands at 17 legions and 3 fleets, with one legion annihilated at the Battle of Wheeling Angels (including at least 4 true dragons slain by the ophanim and 10,000 soldiers taken prisoner and paraded before the Great Raj of Khandiria), one having been disbanded for excessive loyalty to the sultana, and one drowned at the Battle of Seggotan's Tears. The Mharoti fleets are struggling as well, but the keels of a fourth fleet are already laid on the slips at Harkesh, Qiresh, Prezhan, and elsewhere.

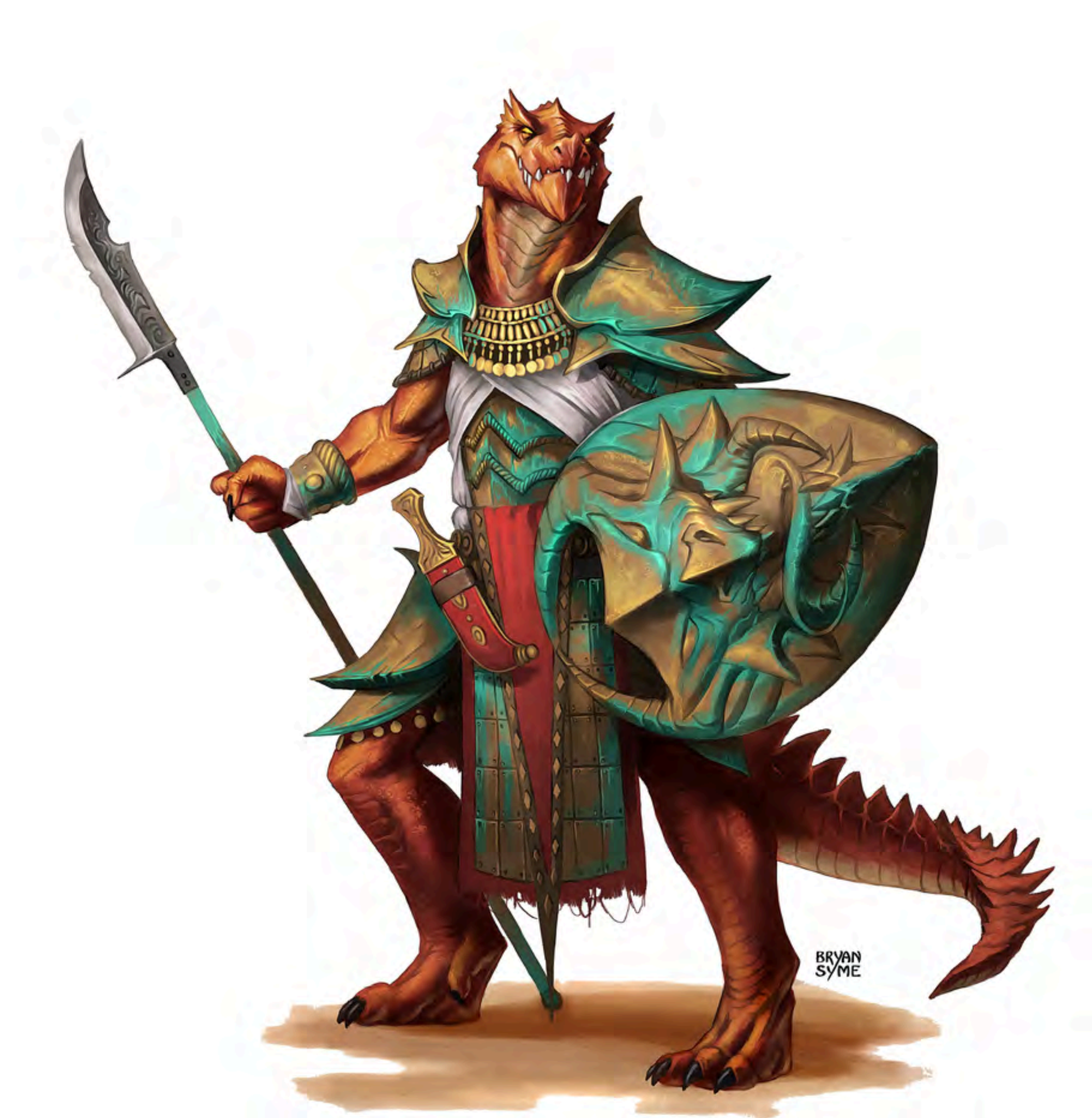
Each Mharoti legion nu
30,000 troops, of which fu
gnoll levies and kobold spe
remainder are heavy troop
infantry and cavalry, but sc
oliphaunts, wyvern knight
on the region.

When the Mharoti army
marches out from Harkesh
at the start of the season, i
is immense, and it gathers
additional auxiliaries on it
way through the provinces
the border. Here was the o
of battle of one such army,
Sultana's Glorious Dawn I
recently destroyed at the h
Khandirians and the Opha
but typical of a legion's stre

- 14,000 jambuka levies
  gnolls
- 4,000 kobold skirmish
- 2,000 kobold archers
- 2,000 ogre shieldbreak
- 400 human and kobolc
- 3,500 edjet dragonkin I
- 1,000 akinji light caval
- 1,200 timarli heavy cav
- 60 wyvern knights
- 65 oliphaunts
- 21 fire and earth elemer
  Collegium
- 18 fire dragons, primar
  adults with an adult or

With more than 28,000 troops, a great army of the Mharoti chews through food and supplies, but the way is eased by mule trains, wagons, and entire camel caravans of supplies as well as local foodstuffs. Most of the livestock is eaten underway, and the Mharoti strategy is dependent on staying close to food sources and seizing both territory and livestock for extended marches. Dragons can always be sent to forage across the border on the herds of neighboring kingdoms.

The Mharoti Empire has attempted to build war wagons in the style of the Magdar. However, the real strength of their army is in the akinji light cavalry and the elemental-fortified skirmishers, and neither of these groups can maneuver in the disciplined ranks required



Sekban, the People

The sekban are the lowest rank of the dragonkin, and a motley mix. Most are dragonkin not disciplined or well-connected enough to join the ranks of the edjet. Those in the military are archers, scouts, skirmishers, and irregulars such as hunting bird handlers, wyvern grooms, or officers among the unscaled. Most are not soldiers at all but rather artisans, millers, merchants, scribes, smallholders, or smiths. They are sometimes overseers of the kobaldi, or they might command a patrol or a ship crewed by humans.

A few sekban are humans with dragon blood.

Edjet, Elemental Families

The classic edjet are heavy troops of dragonkin devoted to one or another of the elemental gods and commanded by paladins or priests. Their general is typically a lesser dragon or major drake, and their officers are timarli. Their numbers include powerful swordmasters, elementalist wizards, priestly warriors devoted to Veles and the Four Elemental Gods, as well as heavily armored lizard-riders, and even oliphaunt-riding artillerists.

The edjet are raised from birth to believe in the superiority of the scaled folk over all others, and their confidence shows on the battlefield. Their charges are swift and crushing, and they fight with a zeal rarely seen in Septime mercenaries or in levied human troops from Khandiria. The edjet are believers, and this gives them courage to stand tall against giants, magic, and even the walking gods of Nuria Natal.

Mixed Blood

The mixing of dragon and human is a topic of great delicacy and danger in the empire. Everyone agrees it happens, and bards and poets sing of the doomed love of a worthy dragon prince for some hideous human creature, surely an abomination.

Sometimes in these tales love conquers all, but more often the dragon prince does the honorable thing and upholds his family line and personal dignity by expunging his feelings and not soiling his name. It's a triumphant moment when the hairy monster is burnt alive to save the family honor. In tragedies, half-blooded children are born, a source of shame and regret.

That's the point of view of the plays and poets. In reality, humans are low-caste and abused by their dragonkin and dragon overlords. The resulting children are typically raised for sacrifice or sent to the front lines in some lost-hope regiment. A few are acknowledged by wind dragons as their own children and serve in Betik or Marea or Harkesh, more tolerant places. Elsewhere, such corruption of "pure dragon blood" is met with harassment, exile, or stoning.

While most dragon-blooded humans are reviled by kobold and dragonkin as mixed breeds and abominations, and many are sacrificed or abandoned as children, some rise above their low station. The old sultana was one of such mixed blood, though fortunately, her draconic mother acknowledged her as legitimate. Even so, her heritage was used as one of the justifications for her ouster.

Akinji, the Fighters

In war, the empire's light cavalry, elementalists, and officers raise small companies. In peace the akinji are its landholders, merchants, priests, mayors, ship captains, and minor figures. Almost all are dragonkin, though a few are lesser drakes. The akinji serve the empire's interests, carry out the orders of the drakes, morza, and the sultan—somewhat akin to the landed gentry elsewhere.

Relatively few of the akinji are major landholders—a few acres or a small mine tucked away with a few villages is the most they can expect. But most akinji are wealthy enough to maintain a horse or war lizard mount and a string of hunting birds or lizards. They are intensely conscious of the empire's successes and its failings since they are on the front lines of policy decided elsewhere.

Timarli, the Nobles

Secure in their power as true dragons, drakes, wyverns, and related scaly folk, the timarli are all minor nobles, generals, ambassadors, mayors, or important priests—and many own larger mines, farmlands, or an impressive city dwelling for their lair and stronghouse. These drakes and lesser dragons also raise companies of troops at their own expense to answer the sultan's call to duty. A successful campaign season is a great credit to them and an opportunity for plunder. An unsuccessful season can result in complete disaster and death; some drakes do not risk the march at Mustering.

Not all timarli hold independent power. Thousands of timarli serve the morza or the sultan directly as advisers, castellans, wardens, seers, spies, senior officers, concubines, and caravan masters. The timarli are known for their ambition, for good reason. If their treasure hoard grows great enough, they are elevated to become one of the scaled lords—and gain a greater share of the empire's tribute.

Urmanli, the Scaled Lords

Not every dragon is a governor, but every dragon is one of the urmanli, the great scaled lords of the land. Some rule cities or command armies, or hold ancient and much-valued valleys in the Dragoncoil, perhaps as temple patrons or mining overseers. Thousands of kobolds and dragonkin attend to these scaled lords, with a noble house of cousins and aunts and uncles to call on.

About 500 dragons rule fiefdoms in the empire, from wind and flame dragons to cave and sea dragons, and all seek to bolster their strength, wealth, and influence for the day when one of the nine morza dies.

On that day, one of the scaled lords can seize the title if he or she is cunning, swift, ruthless, and—above all—well placed with troops and supporters in positions of power. The urmanli are rulers and not used to having any request denied by anyone but another urmanli.

THE NINE MORZA

The nine Great Dragon Lords embody the empire and hold most of its wealth. Their opinions weigh heavily on the sultan, for if the morza are displeased, the sultan might be assassinated, exiled, imprisoned, or summarily executed. The morza are rarely involved in the daily business of the empire, but they are concerned with its wealth and expansion as measured in years or decades.

ADVENTURES AGAINST THE DRAGON EMPIRE

Most adventures in the Dragon Empire involve dragonkind, from kobolds to dragonkin to drakes. Those that involve the Great Dragon Lords are the most dangerous and most lucrative. Their simple motivations include transparent greed and power grabs. More obscure to non-scaly races are issues of nesting rituals, peculiar forms of status or insult, or assassination of seemingly inconsequential personages. Theft is also a common theme.

- Assassinate a Dragon Lord or one of his generals, at the instigation of a likely heir.
- The PCs lead a company in alpine or open plains combat to repel a Mharoti army. They must cut a supply line, halt reinforcements, and guide a mercenary company to reinforce Illyrian bandits seeking to starve out the dragonkin in Parszan.
- Discredit a morza by planting papers implicating a treasonous alliance or threat against the sultan, to make other morza turn against him.
- Steal dragon eggs and smuggle them to the Triolans or Magdar.
- Recover a dragon slayer weapon that can be used against the dragons—currently in a dragon's hoard.
- A villain has stolen a valuable object and given it to a dragon as tribute or a bribe. The PCs must recover it.
- Enter the empire with weapons for jambuka rebels, and deliver them using disguises, guile, brute force, and bribes.
- Summon a tremendous storm to help Kyprion break a naval siege. This requires special ley line magic and incantations or lore from Friula.
- Masquerading as soldiers, the PCs slip into the new Droisha shipyards to sabotage the war efforts but discover a massive attack on Raguza is just days away. They must race to the border to carry vital warnings with the muhta hot on their heels.

ADVENTURES FOR THE DRAGON EMPIRE

If the PCs are loyal citizens of the empire, dedicated to its greater glory, their adventures expand its reach and power and serve the interests of their dragon masters.

- Protect a dragon hoard against thieves during a festival to Baal.
- Watch over the eggs of a Great Dragon Lord while the dragon is called away to urgent matters in the capital.
- Help the sultan's troops storm a fortress: Take the tower, fight a tunnel battle against sappers, and prevent a minotaur general from escaping.
- Find a traitor within the ranks, someone sent to pit Dragon Lords against each other.
- Move a dragon's horde in secret with stealth, portable holes, and a shadow road, and keep its true location hidden.
- Sabotage Triolan shipbuilding or a Kyprion alchemical workshop.
- Secure an orb of dragonkind for a Dragon Lord's use against a rogue dragon in the North.
- Recover a dragon slayer weapon and smelt it down to iron in one of Baal's tophets.
- Secure a new drug that is addictive to dragonkind. Every morza wants to control it, but the source is limited.
- An official has been assassinated by Rumelan rebels in a public place. The killer must be found and burnt alive.
- The ghost folk struck a caravan, carrying off magical relics vital to Morza Glauvistus's war preparations. Lord Khayr al-Agara needs some brave souls to brave the Bone Pit to recover the items before they can be corrupted by the blood priests of the White Goddess.

THE PROVINCES AND THE MORZA

The empire is divided among its lords into nine provinces. Each lord considers its domain the most important, but in truth all have their virtues and some are clearly more magical, more fertile, or more spacious than others. Poets declaim the virtues of the provinces to each Dragon Lord as a matter of public order. It is important to know that the most beautiful, bounteous, learned, and fruitful province is always the one a traveler currently stands within.

Mharot and his companions are some of the surviving Dragon Lords of the twelve who formed the original compact over 300 years ago, plus a scattering of newcomers. They are three fire dragons (called red dragons in the North), one cave dragon, one flame dragon, one silver and two gold dragons (called wind dragons within the empire), and one star drake.

ATESHAH, LORD OF GIZMIRI PROVINCE

Padashah of the Flaming City, Morza of the East, Heart of the Desert, Khan of the Province of Gizmiri

The dominion of Ateshah is the Burning Sands, a deadly wasteland that is what it is due to the dragon who rules it. Ateshah incorporates the essence of fire as few dragons do: his fiery presence creates the desert around him, and he carries it with him wherever he goes.

Ateshah lives in the holy temple of Al-Ajach in the city of Sarkland. Only dragonkin, efreet, and other fiery creatures can survive the burning presence of Ateshah. He hasn't left the temple for decades, but the Mharoti fear the prophesized day when he will.

Ateshah's ultimate goal is to turn all of Midgard into an extension of his realm. Instead of putting himself at risk by waging wars, he searches for ancient knowledge to increase the reach of his presence over the known world.

GIZMIRI, THE RED PROVINCE

Gizmiri is a wasteland of red desert sand and bones, the remnants of entire armies of Khandiria, and most of it could easily be considered the western part of the Red Wastes. Little grows here and most inhabitants are kobolds and dragonkin who profit from the region's mines and the fishing along the coast. The ruins of several Khandirian cities litter the plain, each thoroughly sacked and plundered when the Dragon Empire took the city. In other places, small hills stand out from the flat landscape; these are the burial mounds of dragons slain in battle by Khandirian sorcery.

SARKLAND

Sarkland, the City of Dust, is a trade center and a crossroads for goods and ideas, and it grows rich by selling everything to everyone. That said, Sarkland is the largest—and more or less only—city of Gizmiri, a hive of military watchfulness and the springboard for spring or fall campaigns against the Khandiri. It is the central breeding ground for war lizards and hunting lizards, both of which enjoy the baked clay of Gizmiri and eat desert weeds and aloe plants without complaint.

The city has a unique character as well: the bazaars are enormous, built to dragon scale, for the scaled folk love to haggle (and are not above arguing over a price in the noonday sun with a human trader, to watch the seller wilt). Everywhere are small tea shops and the gilded and copper trinkets that the Sarklanders love.

The finest shops sell magical carpets, some enchanted with maze designs from Kyprion, others displaying the gold-coin patterns that dragonkin adore, and still others shimmering with a peacock's spread of rich colors that bring magical balm and blessings to those who keep them in their homes. The looms from which the Sarklandi carpets spring demand the constant work of the province's people: keeping sheep and silkworms, harvesting, dying, and spinning the yarns, and finally weaving them into a useful and pleasing form. It takes years to create a large work, or even decades for a large, enchanted carpet. Rare war carpets are dyed with the blood of the fallen and displayed as memorials.

SEGGOTAN'S DEMESNE

The tenth province of the empire is that of the sea, the domain of Seggotan and the route to riches south and east of the empire and to trade connections to Triolo and the North. The waves and islands are the great dragon turtle Storros's domain, and this dragon is accounted the leading admiral of the Mharoti fleet, charged with destroying Triolan, Khandirian, and Nurian shipping in times of war.

Storros is somewhat slothful in this duty, preferring knowledge over valor—thus his title as the Sea Sage. Some of his children and servants are much more aggressive in pressing the fight. Sea serpents and dragons are not the empire's only navy: considerable effort is expended on war galleys and barges that carry wind or fire dragons over the sea. The region under the waves might be claimed and ruled by Storros, but in practice the province is rarely visited by humanoids.

Ruins of Kukkutarma: Haunted by wraiths and grey thirsters, this former city of Khandiria has been extensively looted. Its undercity is ruled by mummies, undead gnolls, and bloodsucking werebats.

Ruins of Harrapo-Dar: Once a city of great ziggurats, cool canals, and flowering gardens and that was part of Ishadia at its height, Harrapo-Dar is now a series of useful wells and a few windmills that pull up water for merchant caravans. A single enormous caravanserai called the Mouth of Maraut remains at the heart of the city, though it shuts its gates like a fortress at night.

SATARAH AL-BELDESTANI, CASTELLAN OF HARKESH

Keeper of the City, Castellan of Harkesh, Counter of Coin

When Satarah—the legendary dragonborn paladin of Seggotan—climbed the Sky Stairs of Beldestan, most expected that to be the end of her legend. Yet she returned, transformed into a star drake, and her goodness and righteous strength had been transformed into a much wilier, more cynical, and cunning character. Many refused to believe she was the same person.

But magical divination and consultation with spirits alike confirmed it was Satarah, and she had returned with a mission from Seggotan and Veles-Beyond-the-Void. Her secret knowledge helped her establish a Cult of the Empty Star, devoted to ancient knowledge and the "blood truth" of arcane power and heritage. She continues to agitate for a dangerous war with Nuria Natal, which the sultan is listening to with half a mind to send Satarah out of Harkesh to the front.

Satarah is implacable and hungry for power, and her new form has expanded her ambition a hundredfold. Her connections to void cultists and even void dragons make her a frightening figure for one so small in size.

Harkesh, the Golden City

The dragonkin say, "Harkesh shines like gold in the sun," by which they mean it is both a treasure and a tremendous distraction from other things. The capital city is a province unto itself, and it includes most of the flatlands on the southern shore of the Mavressa Strait. Its huge population depends on the other provinces to feed it, with huge grain shipments arriving daily from Marea and from Nuria and herds of sheep and goats driven down from pastures in the Dragoncoil Mountains in spring, summer, and fall. Steel, copper, ceramic tiles, straw, fodder, and leather: everything comes to Harkesh in vast quantities. Even its water is piped in via an aqueduct to supplement the output of its many springs.

Harkesh contains tiny patches of claimed ground, small fiefdoms held as lairs by the noble courtiers to the sultan, kobolds and dragonkin and others. The manors and perching towers are well decorated and guarded, and a surprising amount of the land is given over to private gardens. The city's enormous size makes it the center of Mharoti political life, though the Great Dragon Lords aside from Satarah visit rarely. More often, they send emissaries, factotums, and various courtiers to plead before the Portal of the Void, the capital's enormous temple to Veles, the invisible and infinite world serpent (see Chapter 12).

The docks of Harkesh throng with people from a dozen lands, and here Rubeshi slaver-pirates rub shoulders with Friulan librarians, Khandirian priest-nobles, Bemmean apprentices, Nurian smiths, and Triolan merchants. Though Harkesh is a place of politics, the harbor has room for a thousand ships and practically forms a second city in the straits. Some say the draconic waterfolk—a strange breed of sailing travelers called the Seggosi—need never step foot on land. They are responsible for the empire's trade in grain, fish, timber, metals, and dyes.

Highlights of Harkesh

It is impossible to do justice to all the marvels of Harkesh, its variety, its small miracles, its cruelties and hidden byways. Here are some places visitors might wish to see for themselves.

Arsenal of Mharot: Containing weapons, armor, fire potions, alchemical smoke and heat stones, and entire siege weapons stored for transport by ogres in harness, the Arsenal of Mharot is heavily guarded, heavily warded, and never empty. The arsenal's quartermaster is the meticulous and cautious Berkant Sumezze, a flame dragon friend of the sultan and Castellan Satarah.

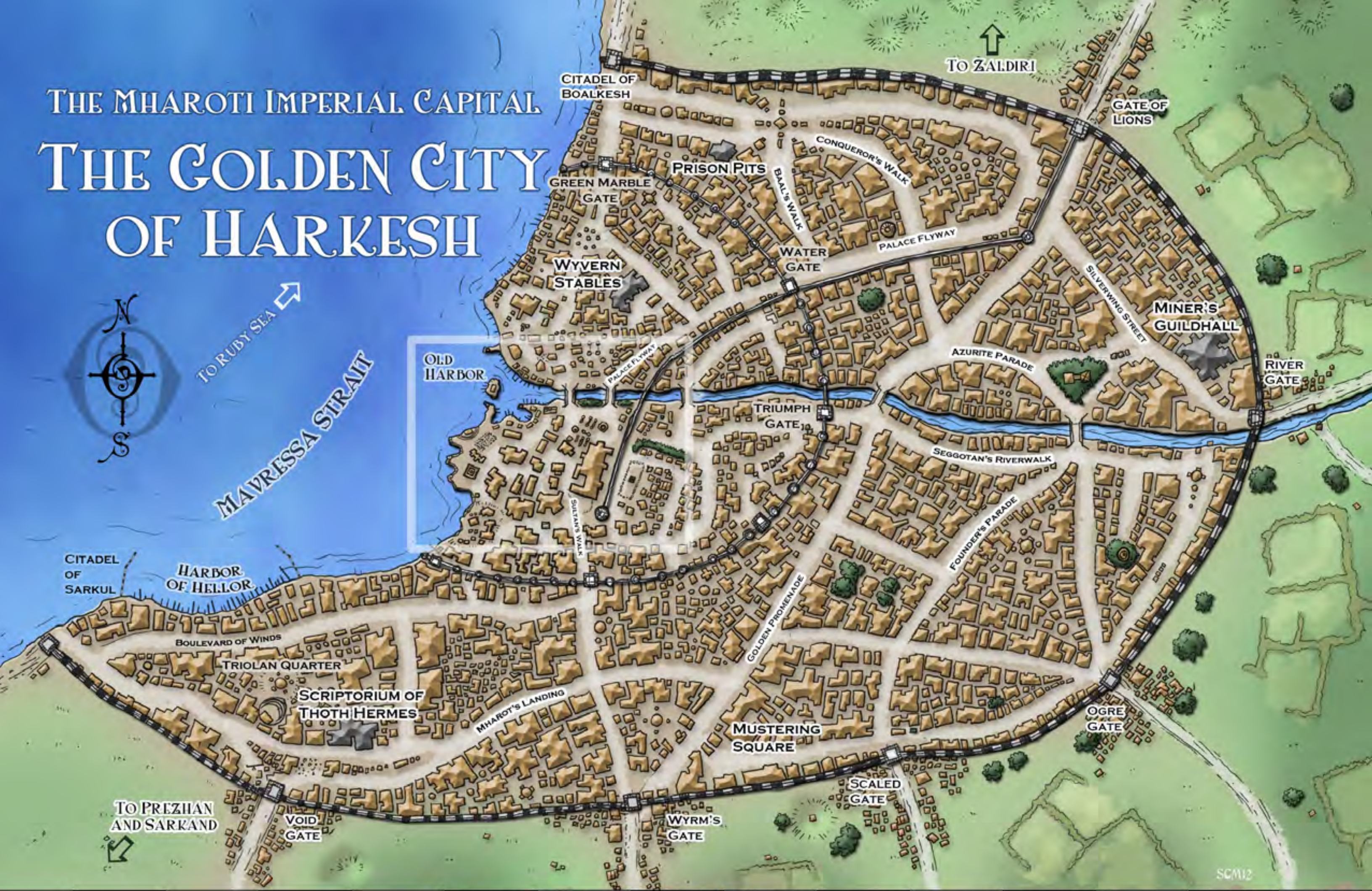
Azuran Open Temple: This mountaintop temple has a commanding view of the city and the straits.

Brotherhood Temples: Priestly warriors of the elements take their vows and then come here to train in combat. Schools of war more than schools of theology, the five brotherhoods are also charitable societies devoted to feeding the poor.

Drake's Quarter: Along a cliff in the southern portion of the old harbor, hundreds of drakes have carved elaborate homes in the sheer rock.

Edjet Barracks: The barracks stand apart from the palace and empty during the summer campaigning season. The sultan's favored troops rest here in the winter, and they sometimes riot for better food or more heatstones.

Flights of Fancy: A shop specializing in flying creatures and flying magic. The owner Zingara Paltikarza (LG female human sorcerer 11) has close connections to Yiraz Azah, the powerful Dragon Lord of Marea, and a deep mastery of elemental magic. Some believe Zingara once assisted the


THE MHAROTI IMPERIAL CAPITAL
THE GOLDEN CITY OF HARKESH
To Zaldiri
Citadel of Boalkesh
Gate of Lions
Prison Pits
Conqueror's Walk
Green Marble Gate
Baal's Walk
Palace Flyway
Water Gate
Wyvern Stables
Silverwing Street
Miner's Guildhall
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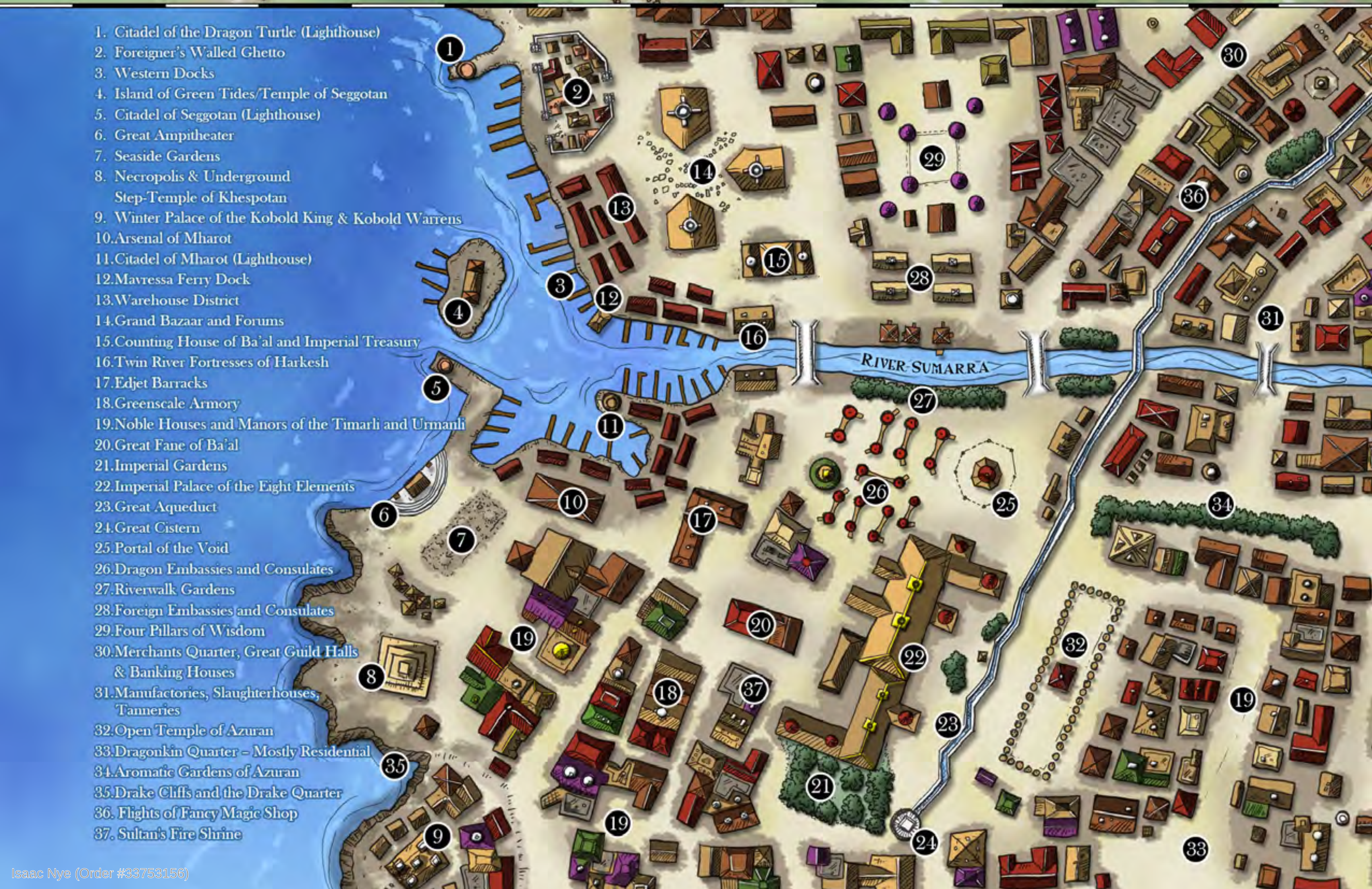
To Ruby Sea
Old Harbor
Palace Flyway
Azurite Parade
River Gate
Mavressa Strait
Triumph Gate
Seggotan's Riverwalk
Sultan's Walk
Founder's Parade
Citadel of Sarkul
Harbor of Hellor
Golden Promenade
Boulevard of Winds
Triolan Quarter
Scriptorium of Thoth Hermes
Mharot's Landing
Ogre Gate
Mustering Square
Scaled Gate
To Prezhan and Sarkand
Void Gate
Wyrm's Gate
SCM12


River Sumarra
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1. Citadel of the Dragon Turtle (Lighthouse)
2. Foreigner's Walled Ghetto
3. Western Docks
4. Island of Green Tides/Temple of Seggotan
5. Citadel of Seggotan (Lighthouse)
6. Great Ampitheater
7. Seaside Gardens
8. Necropolis & Underground Step-Temple of Khespotan
9. Winter Palace of the Kobold King & Kobold Warrens
10. Arsenal of Mharot
11. Citadel of Mharot (Lighthouse)
12. Mavressa Ferry Dock
13. Warehouse District
14. Grand Bazaar and Forums
15. Counting House of Ba'al and Imperial Treasury
16. Twin River Fortresses of Harkesh
17. Edjet Barracks
18. Greenscale Armory
19. Noble Houses and Manors of the Timarli and Urmanli
20. Great Fane of Ba'al
21. Imperial Gardens
22. Imperial Palace of the Eight Elements
23. Great Aqueduct
24. Great Cistern
25. Portal of the Void
26. Dragon Embassies and Consulates
27. Riverwalk Gardens
28. Foreign Embassies and Consulates
29. Four Pillars of Wisdom
30. Merchants Quarter, Great Guild Halls & Banking Houses
31. Manufactories, Slaughterhouses, Tanneries
32. Open Temple of Azuran
33. Dragonkin Quarter – Mostly Residential
34. Aromatic Gardens of Azuran
35. Drake Cliffs and the Drake Quarter
36. Flights of Fancy Magic Shop
37. Sultan's Fire Shrine

Dragon Lord on the front lines in her expansion efforts, before retiring to a quieter life selling magic.

Four Pillars of Wisdom: Four temples of Azuran lie within sight of each other. Street battles between them are somewhat ritualized on the first day of each month. Murder is not infrequent when the sects are at odds with one another.

Grand Bazaar: Anything and everything is for sale here, and carpets and incense are merely the start. Creatures and goods bought and sold here include everything from ostriches to war camels and from mithral scimitars to golden spoons. Most food and animal products, however, are sold in Mustering Square.

Great Fane of Baal: The fane is lavishly decorated with eternal flames, garish red stone arches, and gilded statuary. The Great Fane is not subtle, and it is never cold. A favored place for young courting couples among the dragonkin.

Greenscale Armory: This small armory for drakes and dragons caters to scaly races with harnesses that can help an adult dragon reliably carry a company of 50 or more kobolds in flight or claw sheaths enchanted to intercept spells or sunder feathery wings. The Greenscale Armory's accessories are rarely seen outside the field of battle.

Imperial Palace of the Eight Elements: The Sultan's Palace is a sprawling complex of gardens, barracks, halls, harem, and private apartments, combined with state rooms for the Sublime Throne and halls for business and entertainment. A high walkway connects it directly to the Sultan's Fire Shrine.

Island of Green Tides: The great temple of Seggotan is an island unto itself and also the site of the city's customs and home to its harbormaster.

Mavressa Ferry Dock: Every day, thousands of dragonkin and visitors march onto the great ferries and make the one hour crossing to the Zaldiri lands.

Miner's Guildhall: Built of garish red and pink stone decorated with glinting fool's gold, the guildhall is largely the province of kobaldi gang bosses, mine owners, and the sellers of ingots and raw metal in a dizzying variety. The hall tends toward nocturnal hours, though some business is always conducted at dawn and dusk to suit dragonkin buyers.

Mustering Square: An enormous field where the sultan and the high priests bless the armies each year before the spring campaign. At other times, an open-air market for produce, animals, and slaves.

Necropolis of Khespotan and the Step Temple: The Step Temple is carved out of the stone and entirely below ground level. The enormous Necropolis rivals those of Nuria Natal and Siwal.

Palace of the Queen of Kobold Queens: A rat's nest guarded by thousands of officious porters and keen-eyed guards, courtiers, functionaries, and trapsmiths, the Palace of the Queen of Queens is an amusement to some. The kobolds are quick to take offense at any laughter or disrespect of their sovereign, who "commands the loyalty of millions."

Portal of the Void: The temple of Veles is a modest religious destination since it has so few ordained priests, but it serves as a house of justice and negotiation. Contracts are signed here, marriages arranged, and oaths sworn. In recent years, the Order of the Empty Star has replaced much of the older priesthood, preaching and daily keening song of imperial glory and rightful rule; their calls to action and to praise of the Dread Sultan and "the Prophet Satarah Al-Beldestani" skirt the edge of what the other morza can tolerate.

Prison Pits of Voggoth: The prison is watched by gnolls and other jambuka with dragonkin overseer and Imperial Headman Tolga Sohner responsible for both prisoners and executions. Those sentenced to the pits rarely return to see the sun again. The sultan has spoken of expanding the pits recently.

Scriptorium of Thoth-Hermes: A house of records maintained by Nurian merchants and travelers, this is both an unofficial temple to the Nurian gods as well as a meeting place for its people and a hall of trade and (some claim) espionage. The scriptorium's owner and chief priest is Taavetti Sin Thoth (LN male human cleric 11 [Thoth-Hermes]).

Sultan's Fire Shrine: An entirely gilded temple near the palace, once for the sole use of the sultan and the morza, now used for high state occasions and readings of the auguries.

Triolan Quarter: A walled ghetto for non-scaly folk, and where most Septime and Nuria visitors stay. The Triolan merchant houses all maintain warehouses here, even in times of war. The warehouses are occasionally looted by angry mobs of dragonkin or kobolds when a Triolan fleet commits some impertinence. The quarter was most recently sacked (and partly burned) seven years ago, when the news of the Battle of Seggotan's Tears reached the city.

Western Docks: The merchant docks are always full with 100 galleons and 200 galleys from the Ruby Sea and from Friula. Non-Mharoti ships are given poorer berths farther from well-maintained quays and warehouses. Most of the heavy lifting for foreigners is done by ogres and some kobold crews. For the sultan's favored merchants, wyverns snatch materials off the deck and giant lizards carry heavier loads directly to the nearest warehouse.

Wyvern Stables of Al-Zherha: Home to the Order of Wyvern Knights, the stables see to the creatures' care, feeding, and (primarily) breeding. The sultan hopes to broadly expand the knights into multiple groups, including a messenger corps, scouts for the true dragons and legions, and (as they are already constituted) airborne strike troops.

Figures of the Court

The first and most important figure of the Elemental Court of the Mharoti Empire is the sultan himself, naturally. But wizards, drakes, dragonkin, and stranger figures throng its halls by the dozens every day. Adventurers might meet these important functionaries in the palace or within the city and its waters.

Aban Qalam ("Wyrm That Walks")

As the Mharoti ambassador to Bemmea, the elementalist Aban experimented with augmenting his draconic blood, inadvertently altering himself forever into a living swarm, a cohesive mass of roaches, beetles, and flies. Recently recalled home to bolster his patron's forces, he has developed other plans, involving a change of rulership in Gizmiri. He plots quietly but effectively and clearly controls a fey road from Bemmea to Harkesh, a tool that saves him a great deal of overland travel.

Jabbir, Herald to the Court

Officially only a herald of Harkesh, this little rakish fop of a faerie dragon is a master illusionist and enchanter. Secretly, he serves as spymaster for his Great Lord Satarah and, when required, as an assassin.

Storros the Sea Sage

With a dozen titles such as Defender of the Middle Sea, Herald of Seggotan, Khan of the Waters, and more, Storros the Sea Sage is one of the most respected councilors of the Dragon Empire and a gifted diviner who keeps an eye on the possible futures spoken by Veles and Seggotan. When he isn't listening to the voices of the undercurrents he keeps to his lair, the Deep Blue Vault, an underwater library whose shelves are made from the sunken wrecks of hundreds of ships.

Sea denizens travel Midgard's oceans to find more wrecks filled with valuables for Storros's inspection—he pays well for new and unusual finds. Within the Deep Blue Vault, the Hall of Figureheads holds numerous carvings, which Storros questions about their former ships and their travels. Storros is consulted when some fateful decision for the empire is required; he is a neutral party and often asked to speak on matters of justice or etiquette as well as matters of wisdom.

Vorel

The Mistress of the Royal Harem and the sultan's spymaster, Vorel specializes in forbidden information and even more forbidden acts. She organizes the sultan's celebrations, and she gathers intelligence in plain sight through her sharp hearing and clever questioning. Vorel is the leader of the empire's assassins, men and women trained to destroy rebels against the throne. Some younger daughters and charismatic ambassadors have started making overtures to marriage or offering their services for the sultan's harem, but Vorel is choosing candidates slowly.

MHAROT THE FOUNDER, RULER OF KALPOSTAN

First Lord of the Empire, Duke of All Flames, Master of the Compact, Great Khan of Kalpostan

The eldest and most powerful elementalist of the empire is Mharot, the dragon who first suggested the compact that formed the empire. Together with Ibbalan, he convinced his fellows to try something new. Despite the venture's obvious success, he rarely leaves the old provincial backwater of Kalpostan; Harkesh and the west are not for him.

Mharot's black wings are streaked with gray, and his presence is so overwhelming that kobolds and even some dragonkin find themselves compelled to worship him when in his presence. Mharot ignores them, speaking primarily to the crimson drakes and marshals who command his legions of fire giants, wyrms, fire scale dragonkin, and salamanders.

Hundreds of dragonkin and drakes attend to his Fire Seal Mountain cavern, a place filled with tribute and rarely open to visitors. Mharot spends much of his time sleeping, waking once or twice a year to attend to urgent matters such as devouring a herd of cattle, appointing emissaries, and speaking the Words of Transformation (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook*) over new-made drakes. His politicking and counseling to the sultan also takes time each spring since he is the voice of the compact.

Mharot's Valley contains three small villages and a nigh-unclimbable peak called the Signer's Tower. The runes carved into the mountain name the twelve dragons who first swore to gather together to create the Mharoti Empire. New morzas' names are carved below the twelve.

He has mellowed with age, and his belly scales have grown glossy and golden with the years. Mharot's treasure hoard is said to rival mountains in size.

DREAM ORACLES AND MHAROT'S MAJORDOMO

While Mharot sleeps and dreams, various soothsayers and dream oracles claim to interpret and promulgate his wishes to the empire. Most of these are charlatans, and their executions are meant to discourage others from attempting any false claims of oneiromancy on the empire's founder and its greatest living dragon. Others rise in their place, gathering a following for a season or two before Mharot wakes and disavows their nonsense.

However, one figure has successfully caught and shared the dreams of Mharot with the sultan and the morza (and some say, occasionally with the blood mages of Kaa'nesh). This is the Grand Başkâhya, the Firespeaker of Mharot, the Esteemed Lord of Smoke and Plunder, Enver Demir Al-Kaa'Nesh. A small man of rather more than 60 years, Al-Kaa'Nesh spends a great deal of time under the influence of baleful lotus magic and the poppies of Yallomena, which grant him the ability to see what dragons dream. He still bears the marks of torture from his youth, a consequence of his first,

BLOOD MAGES OF KAA'NESH

Blood magic is widespread in Midgard, and extremely difficult to root out once its adherents gain positions of power; all those who oppose them tend to die of hideous diseases or swift-acting poisons. Of the many cults that use blood magic, the best known might be the followers of the Sanguine Path, and among wizards, many follow in the vile footsteps of the Taergash the Bloodpurger.

However, two places in Midgard always spring to mind when blood magic is discussed: the vampire-ruled lands of Morgau, and the ogre stronghold of Kaa'nesh on the Ruby Sea, a holding of the Mharoti Empire that provides the dragonfolk with dependably strong and dependably stupid ogres for its armies. The Red Hand Ogres make excellent shock troops—and their tactical sense and arcane power are quite sharp, directed by the Scarlet Heirophant Galusid (LE male human wizard 12) and the members of the alliance of blood mages of Kaa'nesh called the Hunter's Chosen.

The heirophant is the arcane and spiritual leader of the blood mages of Kaa'nesh, and he commands complete loyalty and obedience from the city's inhabitants. Physically, he is not deeply imposing: Galusid is a short man of about 40 years, with tattooed forearms and a quick way with a knife or wand. His black hair and eyes are sharp, and his bulging potbelly belies a high degree of toughness and cruelty.

In arcane terms, Galusid is a terror, for he commands the Hunter's Company, a group of 50 blood mages. This thoroughly blood-soaked company of humans, gnolls, and goblins, with a handful of kobolds, constantly enhances their magic by drawing poison and disease from the blood of victims and spreading it to others. All members of the company are sworn to serve Mharot and the timarli of Kalpostan directly, rather than the Dread Sultan in distant Harkesh. They often go raiding on the Rothenian Plain for centaurs to drag as sacrifices to the Hunter's altar.

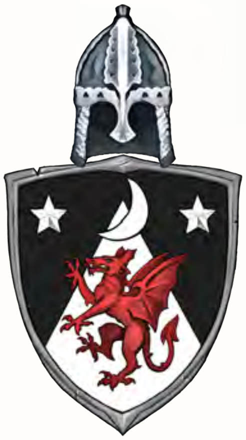
VARIANT: RED HAND OGRES (+1 CR)

The ogres of Kaa'nesh are often tattooed in red swirling patterns; these are enchanted with what the ogres call the Red Hands. When they strike a foe with a melee attack, they gain hit points equal to half the damage they cause, as they drain strength from their foes. A creature struck by a Red Hand ogre cannot be magically healed until after a short rest.

arrogant proclamation of power. Mharot spared his life by vouching for the hairy young dream speaker.

Many have attempted to discover the secrets of Al-Kaa'Nesh's success, but the Grand Başkâhya refuses to take an apprentice, driving away all who arrive and claiming he "waits for a worthy shepherd girl." He lives in a secure tower called the Dreamer's Loft in the hills of Kalpostan, not far from the subject of his analyses. His few servants and guards claim he often forgets he is human, speaking as a dragon and even threatening to leap from a tower window and soar on the wind. At other times, he seems quite canny and lucid, able to describe Mharot's wishes in precise language and with great authority, writing out orders for generals, priests, tax collectors, and even particular timarli or a certain egg warden—no detail escapes him. The various morza worry about his frailty and age; without him to speak accurately for Mharot, the risks of conflict between the members of the compact increase.

Kalpostan, Province of the Heart



Deep in the Dragoncoil Mountains, twelve dragons first signed the compact that made them a nation. Though the province is vast, it remains largely rural and pastoral with only three cities, none of them the largest of the empire. To the contrary, most of the land is strewn with villages and shepherd's huts, and this seems to be by design.

All sorts of wild stories exist about Mharot's Valley, but most of its people are farmers and herders in the fertile valleys, maintaining the enormous herds that feed the empire. Kalpostan provides spear troops and slingers, smiths and armorers, and miners and wool workers. In many ways, its status as the forgotten heartland of the empire means it has changed less than the regions the dragons conquered to the west and south of Kalpostan.

The mountains are prime dragon territory, full of small villages of dragonkin, huge herds of mountain goats and sheep, and home to the finest flying conditions. When westerly or southerly winds hit the peaks, rising currents along the ridgelines are perfect for long soaring and gliding for hundreds of miles.

The peaks are always covered in snow, and the valleys are home to hundreds of small lakes and glaciers. Dragons swarm in the air in the mountains, hunting, flying for pleasure, or taking an offering to one of the tiny Dragoncoil temples, accessible only by air or by a long, long climb. Some believe that the dragonkin were created here, and they are at home as an alpine race.

It is also home to one of the greatest temples of Baal outside the capital, the Shimmering Temple. Its heart is so hot that the earth is molten, and the land around it is surrounded by brightly colored hot springs, each filled with water hot enough to boil flesh from bone. The priesthood of the Shimmering Temple numbers a mere 50, but each is a master of fire and a child of Mharot.

Cogelu, City of Thunders: Once a huge metropolis where jambuka brought reams of tribute, Cogelu fell from favor with Mharot the Founder one night, and the capital was moved to Harkesh. At that time, entire quarters of the city were simply told to leave; the march those hundreds of miles to Harkesh is told in song and story. The old capital retains some ritual centers for the cult of Baal, but it is a much reduced city.

Kaa'nesh, City of Ogres: With more than 10,000 ogres in its walls, Kaa'nesh is the heartland of the giants and ogres who swear fealty to the dragons as well as a stronghold of the blood mages of the empire. It is also home to the Bone Shrine of V'ashra the Tormentor, a patron saint of soldiers and war to the dragons and patron god of ogres and torturers. His dark, bloody cult maintains an enormous bone cathedral in the city, the only temple of its scale and size devoted to this dark god. Elsewhere, ogres pile up bones of their enemies and chant the prayers of V'ashra while torturing prisoners. The city of Kaa'nesh receives remarkably few visitors from outside with the notable exception of Khazzaki raiders who take it as a point of pride to harass visitors and caravans; sometimes they burn entire fields and farms at harvest time.

Kalpostan, City of Dragons: Built entirely for the convenience of Mharot and his progeny, Kalpostan's wide boulevards, enormous stairs, and squat, durable towers are full of sunny perches and easy places to drive a herd of sheep into a slaughtering pen. While kobolds and dragonkin are allowed into Kalpostan as servants and as pilgrims to the Shimmering Temple of Baal-Mharot, jambuka are forbidden from entering the city except as sacrifices to Baal. Somewhere in the city is the gilded, jewel-encrusted entrance to the First Vault of Mharot, where the founder's favorite treasures are stored and warded. Reports are necessarily sketchy.

IBBALAN THE ILLUSTRIOUS, RULER OF MEZAR

Scribe of the Pact, Eldest Morza, the Gold-Cloaked, Khan of Mezar

The empire is Ibbalan's brood and the world his hoard. After having forged the pacts that founded the empire, he left the old lands of Mharot, his primary rival, and led the armies to victory under his benevolent wings. As the eldest Dragon Lord, Ibbalan was also the first to die of old age. Unlike the others, he was prepared for his demise. The empire's guide and guardian in life, through Lord Baal's power Ibbalan sacrificed both his living flesh and eternal rest to finish his incomplete draconic designs upon the mortal world.

Ibbalan wears his hoard as a golden hide of gem-studded scales over his ancient bones. With glorious regalia replete with a crown of orichalcum horns and a gilded death mask, he bears an uncanny resemblance to his living form. Yet in his ashen heart Ibbalan realizes his current existence is a poor facsimile of his former life. He has grown reclusive, directing policy through envoys. Audiences with him consist of executions of criminals, war prisoners, and seditionists, their essences fuel for his immortal soul-fire.

The jambuka of Mezar are terrified of Ibbalan and speak of him as of the worst sort of devil. The dragonkin revere him as the soul of wealth and duty, loyal beyond death.

Mezar, Province of Trade

The province nearest to the border with Nuria Natal is a place of burial and raids since there is no peace between the River Kings and the Mharoti. Ruled by Ibbalan the Illustrious and guarded by legions living and dead, the Mezar province stands ready for a Nurian invasion and constantly prepares for the empire's next attempt to annex Nuria and Per Bastet.

Mezar includes the vital trade routes from east to west and connects merchant centers from Siwal to Sarkland and far beyond, to Capleon, the White Sea, and elsewhere.

Dao-Klarjeti: Mezar's city on the Ruby Sea trades with Parthia and Kalpostan and Perunalia, though reaching the empire's northern coast across the Dragoncoil is quite a feat. It is famous for its twin monasteries of Azuran and Khespotan, and it contributes many edjet troops, paladins, and divine warriors to the sultan's armies, trained in the high mountain strongholds around the city.

Efesis: A city of leisure and culture and the winter capital, beloved by drakes for its fine updrafts and views over the sea. An enormous necropolis of fine vaults and monuments is empty of bones; they were raised and sent marching to Nuria Natal, and most now lie scattered across the Sarklan Desert.

Irkaly: Home to the Great Souk where Sarklandi carpets and Khandiri spices are sold to Nurian and Capleoni traders, Irkaly is also the seat of power for Ibbalan. The city hosts great garrisons and the Elemental Academy, a training ground for the timarli and edjet wizards of the dragonkin.

Harbor City of Prezhan: Home to the Ageless Spire, a great temple of Seggotan, as well as the naval base of the Mharoti, Prezhan was one of the first major ports that the empire seized about 200 years ago. Remnants of its legacy as a minotaur city are few and far between, though a great and labyrinthine cave system connects many of its key points. Its harbor boasts a large lighthouse maintained by the priests of Baal, but the city belongs to the marine side of the elements. The Sea Sage Storros occasionally visits the city in person, and at those times the city is declared to belong to the "domain of the sea" and celebrates a weeklong Festival of Shells.

Mezar, City of Cool Waters: The provincial capital during the warm summer months, Mezar features a magnificent harbor, strong ley line connections, and steady trade with the islands. Its wines are well known, and its various breeds of horses and war lizards are popular among the Mharoti nobles and its cavalry. Its temple to Seggotan is built with columns of green jade, and a cathedral to Khespotan fills a mountain cavern in a nearby valley.

LASHMARAQ TALSHAH, RULER OF HARIZ

Queen of Fury, Marshall of Mayhem, Morza of Beloved Hariz, Defender of the Pact, Voice of Order

Lashmaraq Talshah rules over the isolated Hariz territory on the borders of Beldestan and Khandiria, and she is bent on expanding her territories and the empire. To enable this conquest, she has spent decades building an elite army of dragonkin, drakes, elementals, and humans, arming them all with magic and the best equipment. Her forces are well trained, fast, lean, and ferocious—but most of all, they are deadly and efficient, much like the Dragon Lord herself.

Lashmaraq allows no waste and suffers no incompetence in her army's ranks. Her minions keep meticulous records on everything, and her spies keep a keen eye on the other Dragon Lords and her enemies, reporting their every move back to her.

Lashmaraq lairs somewhere deep within the Lumera Forest, in a sinkhole and cavern large enough for her to fly within. She works hard for every copper in her hoard and twice as hard to keep her troops fit, equipped, and ready for the day they march south and west.

Despite her distance from Harkesh and the intrigues of the throne, the other Dragon Lords fear Lashmaraq Talshah. She might, after all, someday deem them inefficient and unnecessary. At such a point, she will surely rise against them, usurping the empire for herself and uniting it under one capable, strong leader. Until then, she is kept busy defending the northern and eastern borders against the Beldestani, Khazzaki, and the wild wind dragons of the Qaen, far from the centers of power.

Hariz, Province of the Empty Road

Primarily open plains and dense forest, Hariz is relatively unsettled, and many of its inhabitants are nomadic centaurs, humans, and gnolls. The land is under Mharoti control, but with few connections to the rest of the empire and with the threat of horse tribes north and east, it is both somewhat isolated and very poor.

Tabur: The city of Tabur is the only settlement of size in Hariz. Most of its plains and forests are covered with small villages or the yurts of nomadic shepherds who provide meat, wool, and parchment for the western provinces. Tabur trades east with Cathay and Sikkim, and north as far as Vidim and Niemheim, over the Rothenian Plain. Its caravans are well protected, but the dragonkin and kobolds dislike the long trek over the plain, which can take months.

Kazan: A fortress-town on the Lumera River, defending against the Parthian border. A magical stone wall extends north and south of Kazan, preventing easy passage for horse raiders or Parthians. This ferry town on the Lumera River marks the farthest point that ships can pass upriver. The hardy and violence-prone inhabitants spend their days either defending the town from Rothenian raiders or conducting their own assaults against the settlements to the east.

Pahrolendi: South of Kazan on the edge of the Red Wastes, this great fortress atop a red stone plateau serves as the home of Urmanli Nerazi (LE female adult blue dragon), commander of the fortress and a great quartermaster to the Mharoti armies. Pahrolendi is the jumping-off point for most legions marching east against Khandiria.

PARSIS THE HIDDEN, RULER OF BETIK

Master of the Fields and Clouds, Wisest of Lords, the Lord of Chains, Morza of Wisdom, Khan of Betik

As one of only two golden wind dragons of the empire, Parsis is an exotic creature even among the morza. Parsis works extremely well within the empire's structure, and he delegates far less of his province's rule than the other morzas. Parsis retains a tight-knit council called the Golden Circle to conduct the everyday work of Betik. These circle members know his affinity for shapeshifting and disguising his identity: Parsis wanders Betik's cities disguised as a dragonkin or even one of the non-scaly folk, as a lawyer, scholar, alchemist, or other academic. He loves learning and sharing wisdom, as well as the sound of his own voice. He is also a military genius at tactics and strategy and thus holds the hinge province that controls much of the empire. Just as important as his military acumen is his political and diplomatic skill, and he maintains the Mharoti spy network with the Kah-Vizier Zeki Hasan Al-Eski.

The Golden Circle is known for fairness, but recently it has been dogged by rumors of corruption and betrayal as some of Parsis's most valued councilors have been murdered by the sultan's assassins.

Some believe that Parsis has many hidden children, pretending to be humble jambuka but truly dragon-blooded. This rumor gives the other morza further cause distrust Parsis.

Betik, Province of the Book

The province of Betik is home to universities, famous astronomical observatories, and hoards of magic stolen from all corners of the earth. This was a dragon-ruled land even before the Mharoti Compact that founded the empire and might be the place where the dragonborn first walked the earth, though their origin is much disputed. Some believe that the dragonborn are simply large and powerful kobolds, much as hobgoblins are larger and more organized goblins.

Betik is home to a captured flying city of Sikkim, renamed the Cloud City of Ashadar and used as the lair and treasury of Morza Parsis the Hidden. His Golden Circle lives in Ashadar and in the ground city of Uqmal.

The Hidden University in the cloud city is Parsis's seat of government, where the morza values knowledge and delights in debate, rhetoric, and sorcery. Just as important, the Hidden University is home to a wizard's collegium restricted to dragonkin and the dragon-blooded, and six traditional schools of literature, alchemy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and theology open to anyone with the skills to pass the scholar's exam to get in.

The whole of Betik is riddled with invisible castles, cloudtop fortresses, and devices meant to enhance or confound scrying. It has many active ley lines, branching off from the Scholar's Path, and the province is widely considered the arcane heart of the empire. The servants of Parsis scry to confirm tribute is paid, choose a direction for the sultan's armies to march, and even question the spirits, angels, and heralds of enemy gods. Drakes and dragons fly into and out of Ashadar on a daily basis. The city is much too valuable to risk as a military tool, but it does give Parsis a certain level of semi-divine authority.

Naliath Akar: This ancient city predates the empire, and its ruins stand high in the mountains, on the shore of an emerald green tarn and near several glaciers. Near it is an old iron mine, abandoned by the kobolds and dragonkin but still active. Its current owners are shadow fey of the Court of Midnight Teeth, who work by the light of lantern dragonettes digging out iron ore imbued with splitsoul ore. They value this ore highly and have cast several illusions to hide their work from the dragonkin.

Qiresh, City of Waves: A major trade port on the Ruby Sea, this large city trades with Dao-Klarjeti, Reth-Saal, Kaa'nesh, and other ports on the inland sea. It is famous for its indigo cloth and its boat-building prowess; the sultan has a major set of new ships under construction here.

Ruins of Nurduran: A Nurian human city that resisted the arrival of the dragons in the first rush of Mharoti expansion. Charred stones and a few pillars are all that remains.

Ruins of Siyaz: A great experiment by a kobold alchemist named Mektree the Mad went horribly wrong in Siyaz, releasing vampiric mists and flesh-rotting vapors that turned the town from a thriving metropolis to a tomb almost overnight. Scattered bands of gnolls use its empty buildings, but the dragon urmanli consider it a place best left fallow.

Ruins of Xirdalan: Looted and burned by the Khandirians more than 90 years ago, the ruins of Xirdalan contain dragon bones and strange lights but little else. The city predates the empire, but it was abandoned after it was plundered and razed, and it was pronounced cursed and unlucky by the high priest of Azuran. The local joke is that it would have been more helpful to know of its ill-omened nature before the Khandiri oliphaunts and juggernauts arrived.

Uqmal the Azure City: This river town just north of Lake Olheddin carries most of the pilgrims, trade, and barges from the Mharoti hearthland downriver along the slow-moving Arandis to Sarkland and Ishadia, where goods are loaded from barges onto ocean ships and sent to Shibai and the East. Uqmal is famous for its fire dancers and its war lizards, bred to an exacting standard in coloration, endurance, and viciousness. Its teas
much favored by the dragonkin.

RÜZGAR, LORD OF FOG AN
HUNGERS, RULER OF ZALD

Blood Duke of the Dragoncoil Heart, Khan of Zald

Rüzgar is a strange cave dragon who enjoys the su
heights, though his lair is deep beneath the earth l
his kind. Currently he rules one of the empire's no
provinces, a lively place of frequent warfare agains
Magdar Kingdom and raids against Perunalia. He
Rüzgar remains quite bitter that Rumela has escap
claws since he feels (rightly) that his many years of
against Illyria helped bring about its collapse.

Most of his territory is thinly populated, and Rü
enormous hunger for meat and disregard for gove
means that it remains largely unsettled beyond a f
kobolds and jambuka, and their various shabby he

goats and sheep. Armies march under his command, and his thirst for battle means he cares little for anything other than finding enemies and devouring them. The sultan finds Rüzgar useful and his bloodlust congenial; the two often laugh together over their future conquests or over particular battles. Whether Rüzgar is actually capable of leading his province to become profitable rather than merely warlike is a question the other morza ponder from time to time, though none are eager to challenge the Khan of Zaldiri directly.

Rüzgar's Hollow Palace is a hillside cavern overlooking the city of Zaldiri, and he comes out primarily at night. Many believe he is secretly in league with followers of the White Goddess or with ghoul servants of Vardesain and that his realm below the earth is much more developed than the lands under the sun. His gray-black hide is deeply scarred by battle, and his scales have regrown many times, each time tougher and more ragged. His wings are bones and tatters, and Rüzgar cannot fly, a lack which he does his best to disdain with the phrase, "Only the weak seek the sheltering sky."

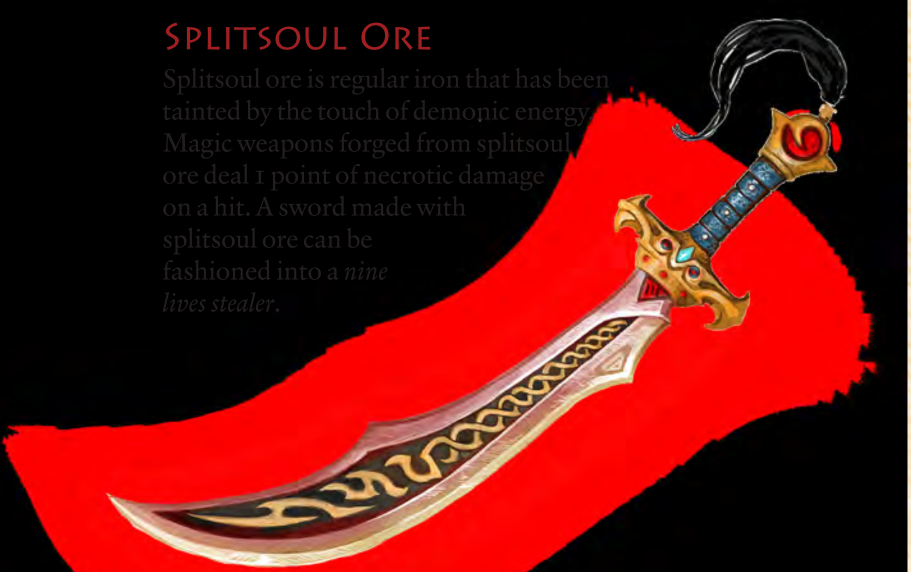
ZALDIRI, PROVINCE OF RUINS

The lands near Perunalia and the Magdar Kingdom are loosely held with legions of soldiers camped in the ruins of Pharos and others at Valogrod.

Ruins of Tirovec: Once a thriving village at the confluence of the River Bellas, north of Mistras, the weavers and felt makers of Tirovec were burnt out by Mharoti dragonfire during the conquest of Zaldiri. Their shops ruined and their homes blackened, the Tiroveckers fled and the town has been abandoned to ghosts and decay ever since. A small clan of kobolds has recently appeared and is building waterwheels, restoring mills, and planting rye in the area.

Splitsoul Ore

Splitsoul ore is regular iron that has been tainted by the touch of demonic energy. Magic weapons forged from splitsoul ore deal 1 point of necrotic damage on a hit. A sword made with splitsoul ore can be fashioned into a *nine lives stealer*.



Ruins of Pharos: Once a seat of learning and a hub of trade, Pharos was razed during the dragon invasion across the Mavressa Straits and has never been rebuilt. Its ruins are swampy, but towers, hillocks, and even half-flooded caverns abound. The place is home to dark dragons and darker ghosts.

Valogrod: Once a Magdar fortress, Valogrod is now the major staging point for Mharoti armies raiding into Perunalia and the Magdar Kingdom. Due to the relative lack of farming villages and even large herds of sheep or goats, the castle's nickname among the legions is "the Hungry Castle." Soldiers raid into the Magdar lands or the White Mountain Marches to secure supplies.

Zaldiri: Built at the mouth of the River Tragos and supplied by sea more than by land, the city is entirely of Mharoti construction, with wide streets and frequent perches to satisfy any drake or dragon. The city is famed for its extensive underground tunnels, cisterns, and caverns, since Rüzgar prefers not to travel above ground by day. The city's temple of Khespotan is called the Telluric Cathedral, a place encrusted in runes, crystal, and powerful ley line magic that dragons find congenial. The underground complex includes a set of sacred catacombs, which are forbidden to all but the scaly folk.

YIRAZ AZAH, RULER OF MAREA AND THE ISLANDS

Yiraz the Cloud Chaser, Morza of Silver Frost, Khanum of Marea

Yiraz is one of the few morza who is not from the Dragoncoil Mountains but rather an emissary from a distant realm in the North. Her gleaming scales and shimmering wings are famously bright, and as a devotee of Azuran, she has preached peace and prosperity rather than the empire's usual wrath-and-conquest since the day she first arrived. Her fellow morza found this more than mildly embarrassing, so the empire's fire dragons assassinated her silver dragon host. She surprised them by claiming his mantle as a morza. She is known for her airy messengers and elemental planar allies, and her province of Marea is unusual for hosting a temple to Boreas, a god rarely found this far south.

Recently, Yiraz Azah's thunderous forces fought against Kyprion and Triolo at sea, and she lost most of a legion to the waters. The irony of her yearning and preaching for peace while practicing war hasn't escaped the dragon. She believes in a chivalrous conquest that brings territories swiftly under her protectorate, rather than letting them fall into the hands of the fire dragons or the rapacious Rüzgar. Like Rüzgar, she believes that Rumela should have been given to her, but she spends little time brooding on this; instead, she makes plans and arguments that Kyprion rightfully belongs within her claws as part of the islands of the Middle Sea.

MAREA AND THE ISLANDS, PROVINCE OF FALLEN TEMPLES

The conquest of Achillon and its territories is 110 years in the past, but the land retains a different character than the lands east of the Mavressa Strait. Heavily populated by humans related to the Illyrians and Triolans, Marea and the islands of Eraklion and Rados are among the rare places in the empire where the dragonkin are distinctly in the minority. Human troops, farmers, and merchants are the majority, a few kobolds and gearforged remain in the area, and the region still speaks Common as often as Draconic. It is ruled with a light hand by Yiraz Azah, the silver dragon scion.

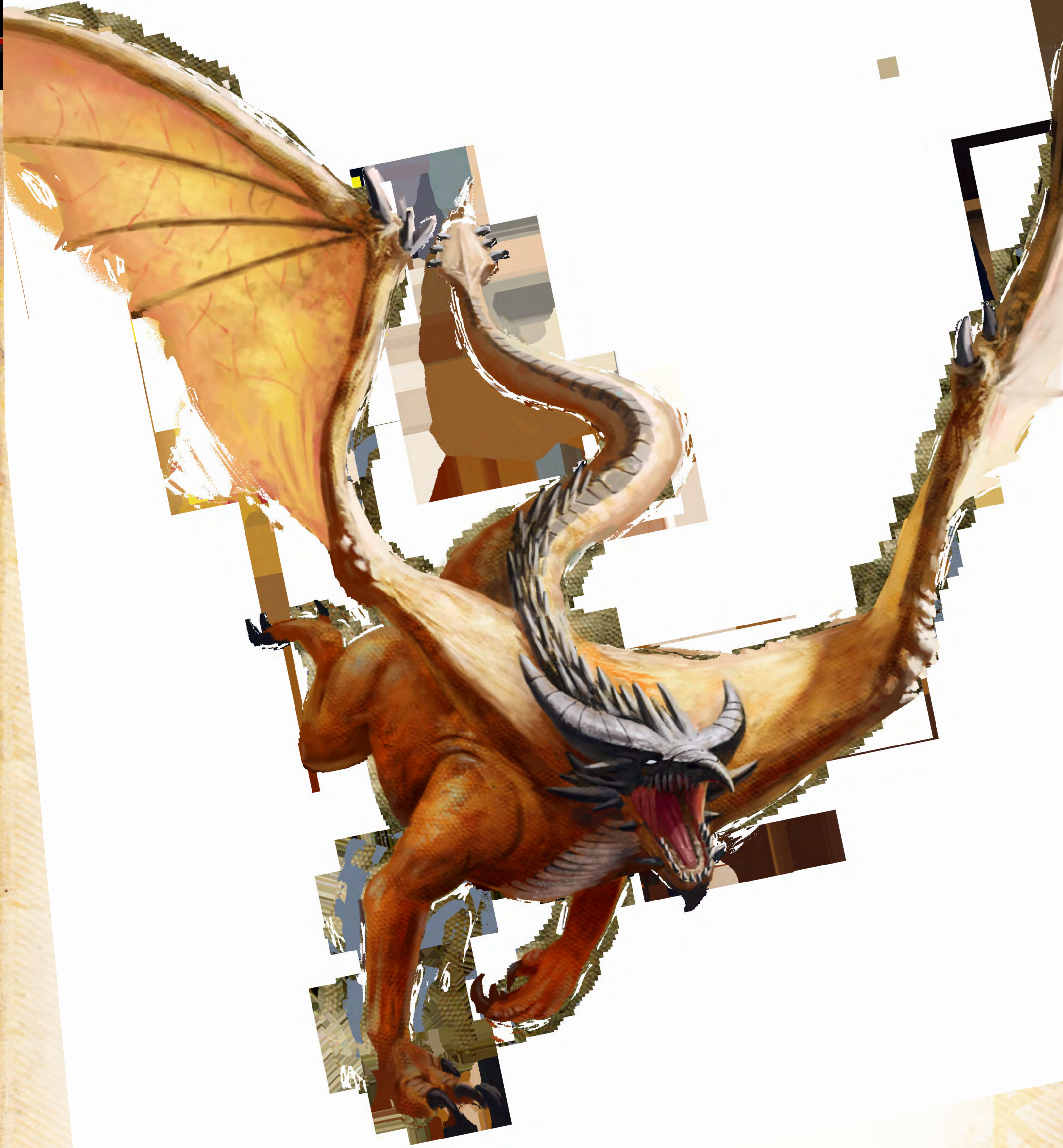
Marea and the Islands also retain a distinct faith centered on Rava, Nethus, Charun, Apollon (Khors), and Ceres. The dragon gods have temples here, but they often remain empty. Yiraz's temple to Boreas likewise has few followers. The arrival of priests of Seggotan at the temples of Nethus a generation ago proved temporary since, when the sea god returned, the temples in Marea were among the first to be brought back to life with his divine gifts. Many of his priests have left lives of exile or cloistered hermitage and now work with a will preaching in the harbors or serving aboard Mharoti ships. The Mharoti believe that these priests are organizing a rebellion against draconic rule and watch them closely; several priests of Nethus have already been martyred for speaking blasphemy against the sultan and Seggotan. This has enflamed local passions, which Yiraz and her servants are at pains to quell.

Achillon: A human city of merchants and architects. Known for sculptors and clever accountants, this is one of the few places in the empire where gearforged live in some numbers.

Eraklion: A small fishing island that is also home to a temple of Nethus.

Methony: A small circular fortress guards the harbor of this important naval outpost. The city is a key point of the Mharoti defenses against Triolan corsairs. Its governor and garrison commander is a dragonkin elementalist named Serhat Baalat (LN male dragonborn sorcerer 9).

Mistras Marea: A silk-producing city on a mountaintop with a long tradition of producing its wares only for dragonkin and officials of the empire.



jambuka,

ant.

Once, the Land of a Thousand Heroes stretched from the White Mountain Marches to the shores of the Ruby Sea, but that was long ago. Pushed back by old Verrayne and long-dead Mharoti sultans, Illyria held the line until seven years ago, when the flame dragon

Glauvistus led a horde of edjet troops, akinji cavalry, and kobold archers across the border. Despite the dedication of the Illyrian army and the bravery of the duchy's heroes, the defenders fell in droves.

Appeals for aid either arrived too late or, in the case of the Archmage of Lonely Spire, were never answered. Within a month, the old Illyrian nobles had fled, the human armies were scattered or dead, and the Silver Duchess was captured in the palazzo of the Palasi Ardenu, surrendering herself and her duchy to the victorious dragons. Today, a new Mharoti province thrives. The empire's most recent morza fortifies her holdings while dragonkin enforcers root out any dissention among the cowed population. Though the Illyrian dream flickers, it has not been extinguished . . . yet.

A Defeated People

Fear, depression, and simmering anger pervades the cities and countryside. Draconic oppression grinds out the embers of the old martial tradition of Illyria that once produced treasure-seeking heroes and hippogriff-riding generals. The lash of the Muhta—a brigade of dragonkin rogues in charge of enforcement and rooting out dissention—holds cities tight while kobold drake riders patrol the countryside and oversee the building of new pastures and farms. Even minor unrest meets with massive reprisals and executions. Those brave (or foolish) enough to rebel lie rotting in mass graves. Most of the hundreds of noble families fled to Triolo, Trombei, Kyprion, or the Magdar Kingdom.

Those remaining, such as House Callensoe, collaborate to retain the shreds of their former glory. The common people no longer dream of gaining a noble title through daring deeds or martial prowess. Instead they pray to any deity who will listen for liberation. The Mharoti ignore these pleas; they do not plan on ever relinquishing their newly acquired land, and they have grown expert at turning a conquest into a peaceful dominion.

Court of the Scourge

With her crushing defeat of Illyria as proof of her worth, Glauvistus was personally anointed as the new Morza of Rumela by Sultan Ozmir Al-Stragul. Possessing temper and avidity in equal measure, the flame dragon delights in endless cycles of manipulation, destruction, and ruin, whether in the inferno of her deadly breath or by the intricate, decades-long plots she relishes constructing. Her rise to morza is the latest of her intrigues and certainly only another step in her dance of dark ambition.

Glauvistus plans a long and prosperous rule, and she traded relics and favors from her personal hoard to other morza of the empire for additional troops, specialists, and material support. These reinforcements trickle in much slower than the flame dragon would prefer, so she has yet to move against Raguza or Triolo. Instead, she concentrates on turning the Palasi Ardenu into a fortress palace worthy of her glory while strengthening Droisha and the mountainous border with Triolo with massive fortifications. She keeps the remaining human nobility turning against each other and the population, partly to eliminate rebellions and foreign spies but mostly because it amuses her. Glauvistus uses harsh laws and unfair conditions to goad those who plan on rebelling into doing it early, so her Muhta can round them up.

A fixture in the Court of the Scourge, the copper dragon Zrandres (CN male young adult copper dragon) leads the Muhta. While a prisoner of the Illyrian Duchess, the dragon took note of every insult, every curse, and every glob of spittle or trash thrown his way. Now freed from his imprisonment, he relishes his revenge. His dark-cloaked dragonkin deliver harsh punishments for the slightest infraction, and no secret remains a secret for long thanks to the copper dragon's network of informers and collaborators.

Droisha, City of Eagles

The heart of Rumela, war-scarred Droisha slowly rebuilds from the conquest. Though her marble columns and broad causeways still loom proud and ancient over the wine-dark sea, high fortifications and new watchtowers cast shadows upon the streets below as well. At the city's center, the new black walls and siege weapon emplacements of the Palasi Ardenu provide a constant reminder of the power of the morza. The fine, weathered stonework buildings of the city's piazzas stand in stark contrast to the outer sprawl of barracks, training yards, and hammering forges of the sultan's Grand Western Legion.

High-ranking akinji and timarli dragonkin occupy the estates abandoned by slain or routed nobles. The four remaining human noble families—Callensoe, Oreste,

Demographics of Occupation

Given the disparity of numbers between the more than 400,000 human, dwarf, and minotaur inhabitants of Rumela and the approximately 30,000 draconic newcomers, one might assume the locals could easily push the invaders back to the empire. However, the standing army of Illyria before the invasion was only around 7,000 or 8,000 strong. With their soldiers dead or fled across the border, the civilian population (with no combat training) stands no chance against the Mharoti army. Additionally, consider the devastating impact of the drakes and lesser and true dragons supporting the Grand Legion. Dragons flying over population centers on a daily basis do more to keep the people cowed than tens of thousands of legionnaires.

Valona, and Zenevisi—collaborate with their new masters. The Mharoti tolerate these families as long as their manufacturers continue to produce fine weaponry under the watchful eyes of dragonkin overseers. These nobles maintain a veneer of civility, throwing parties and galas as if matters in the country were normal.

The draconic citizens of the province worship Azuran and have rededicated the massive Temple of Victory opposite the Palasi to his glory. The other four great shrines in the city honor Baal and Khespotan. Many humans also give homage to Azuran, if only to avoid angering their new masters. Those who cling to the old Illyrian gods such as Perun or Mavros do so in private shrines, well hidden from the prying eyes of the Muhta.

TO DISPLAY A DUCHESS

The former ruler of Illyria, Veristi Terramaine, spends her days and nights on public display chained to a massive stone block before the gates of the Palasi Ardenu—a message to all who think to stand in the way of the empire. Baba Yaga's enchanted shackles, created to hold a dragon and altered by the finest mages in Harkesh, now bind Veristi's wrists. Glauvistus makes sure the former duchess does not suffer physically, if only to lengthen her mental anguish. Kobold attendants bring her food and water while dragonkin clerics keep her healthy with spells and potions. Every morning, her former prisoner Zrandres makes a point to visit and remind her of all she has lost or seen cast to ruin.

GRAND WESTERN LEGION

The Morza of Rumela commands a massive army with more than 20,000 troops. A constant stream of soldiers and workers move back and forth from Droisha to the new settlement of Kruja and other forts while sekartair messenger birds carry reports from spies and observers on the Triolo border. To feed and supply this great army, massive pastures of oxen, aurochs, and other herd beasts dominate the open lands south and east of the White Mountains while camel caravans wind their way from the empire with material support.

The flame dragon keeps the army in two halves but rotates personnel back and forth as necessary. The Kruja contingent, under the direction of the fire giant king General Stalek al-Grodoccor, defends the border to Triolo and manages the construction of massive fortifications. Glauvistus oversees the other half of the Grand Legion stationed in Droisha.

Below the walls of Droisha, new shipyards lay in rows along the coast while dragonkin crafters push to build new vessels of war and a detachment of a dozen dragon turtles guards the mouth of the harbor.

OTHER SITES

The native inhabitants of the former Illyrian territory wrestle with their new status as Mharoti citizens with mixed results.

BONE PIT: South of Parszan, an open wound spews a sulfuric miasma into the sky. Lined with scaffolding formed from the skeletal remains of sacrifices to the White Goddess, this hole leads deep underground. The ghost folk venerate the Bone Pit, believing it to be a blessed causeway between their deep realms and the surface world.

DRAKE'S PERCH: This high castle once held the legendary Sky Riders, but it's now ruled over by the bronze dragon Hakanazal and his force of dragonkin wyvernriders. They keep a vital watch on the largest mountain pass into Triolo.

GRIFFONCRAGS: The southern Griffoncrags once served as an important buffer between the Mharoti Empire and Illyria. Now, garrisoned by the Mharoti kobolds, eleven brass Anaxi Towers dot the peaks keeping watch on the mountain passes.

KRUJA: This small but bustling city is a chaotic mix of hastily constructed barracks, forges, and supply depots at the mouth of the River Drisalon. The entire focus of Kruja rests on constructing the new fortifications lining the mountain passes between Rumela and Triolo.

MARAUDER'S POINT: Above wave-wracked cliffs, a crumbling wreck of a tower stands on the very end of this slip of land. A hidden band of spies uses the ruins, and the caves beneath, to spy on Triolan ship movements.

WINEWOOD: The forest east of Droisha was long a place of smallfolk such as gnomes and satyrs and also known as the birthplace of the wizard Arshin the Enchanter. It remains largely untouched by the Mharoti, though the outer edges have been heavily logged to build new barracks, carts, and ships for the sultan. The ruins of Arshin's Tower are rarely visited.

WHITE MOUNTAIN MARCHES

While most consider it part of Rumela, this wilderness has never been under the control of any lord; it has always been the domain of petty warlords, bandits, and ghost folk. Despite the increased presence of dragonkin in the region, it remains largely empty of settlements.

This wilderness was once a rich source of minerals, silver, marble, and iron. Small goat-herding villages dotted the valleys. Now, aside from a few heavily guarded mines, only the forts of bandits and warlords remain. The closest thing to a feudal lord is the dragonkin Lord Khayr al-Agara (NE male dragonborn fighter 15), commanding 8,000 mixed troops stationed in Parszan to safeguard mining shipments and combat the growing ghost folk incursions. The region remains a fine hiding place for bandits, Illyrian dead-enders, and monsters.

THE GHOST FOLK

The arcane pollution from hundreds of old battles between Illyria and the Mharoti Empire saturated the ground with dragon's blood and spell residue. This effluvium brought the ghost folk to the surface. Previously thought legendary, the ghost folk are humanoids with distorted features and misshapen limbs. They plague the White Mountain Marches, tunneling through the ground with supernatural speed and bursting from the earth in skittering waves to overwhelm caravans or small settlements. With their faces chalked in white, the ghost folk never make a sound.

Dedicated to the White Goddess (see Chapter 12), they carry away sacrifices to power a great ritual, decades in the making, which they believe will cleanse the surface of the "despoilers." The ghost folk fight to recover the bodies of their dead. The few slain specimens recovered reveal a race formed from the degenerate interbreeding of barbaric humans with deep orcs.

PARZSAN

Parzsan was entirely a city of bandits and outlaws, those driven out of more civilized towns by the sultan's warrant or by an order of exile from Triolo or the Magdar queen. Pirates seeking a quiet escape, cultists on the run from the paladins of Khors, and various gnolls and dragonborn all found their way to the town's relatively quiet streets. Many of its inhabitants still call themselves mercenaries, guards, and hedge knights.

Since the conquest of Rumela, the Dragon Empire has laid claim to the city, though things are not going well for the city's warlord, the dragonkin Lord Khayr al-Agara. His thousands of troops have made it possible to safeguard shipments from the Zlato Mine back to Zaldiri and Harkesh, and a Mharoti flag flies from the Emerald Tower of Parzsan, a six-sided keep overgrown with poisonous vines. However, half of Lord Khayr's troops are on the road south at any time. The remainder patrol against the ghost folk incursions that plague the city, and the town's oaken gate shuts each night at sundown; quite a few rocs, basilisks, wolves, and worse roam the valley, especially near Old Brezla.

The townspeople continue in their traditions of buying most of their food, wine, and other needs from Triolo, Droisha, Cronepisht, Salba, and even Zaldiri, rather than engaging in agriculture. A few skinny cows and goats are brought down from the hills every month, but Parzsan runs on gold and iron, and a heavy hand is required to keep its warriors from raiding in every direction at once. Lord Khayr has made some progress in encouraging raids of Salba and the Magdar Kingdom border by offering bounties, and likewise offers 10 gp for anyone bringing in the skull or ears of one of the ghost folk.

OLD BREZLA, CITY OF GHOSTS

This human city was a hub of trade, known for its crops from apples to rye to oats and hops, as well as rich vineyards. Devoted to Ceres and Rava, the Brezlaners maintained a free city with canny diplomacy—until a trollkin necromancer named Sable and a human warlock named Armanius took up residence as tyrants, and the city became a charnel house of blood magic. For a time they threatened Revskaya and Droisha, then their rule collapsed. The ruins are still haunted, and even now, the town square is stained anew with fresh blood at each dark of the moon. Some believe Old Brezla is a stronghold of the ghost folk and that Armanius still lives on in a gilded tomb. The ruins are best avoided after sunset, when unwholesome fogs roll through its streets and the cobblestones emit unholy moans.

LONELY SPIRE

Once a wizards' chapter house, the Lonely Spire now stands sealed and silent among the high peaks of the White Mountains. Prior to the invasion, the Archmage Kolos the Lame (male human wizard 20) molded students into mages of uniformly excellent character and skill. When the Mharoti army stormed across the border, the Duchess of Illyria sent desperate missives for aid to the spire. Though the messengers entered the tower, the wizards never emerged. Correctly assuming her greatest challenge would be from the archmage, Glauvistus led three other dragons to assault the Lonely Spire, but she found nothing other than the sealed tower.

Currently, Serafeddin (CE female young adult white dragon) commands a force of 150 dragonkin soldiers keeping watch on the Lonely Spire. Having grown quite bored, the dragon occasionally sends scouts or bands of adventurers into the tower, but so far none have returned.

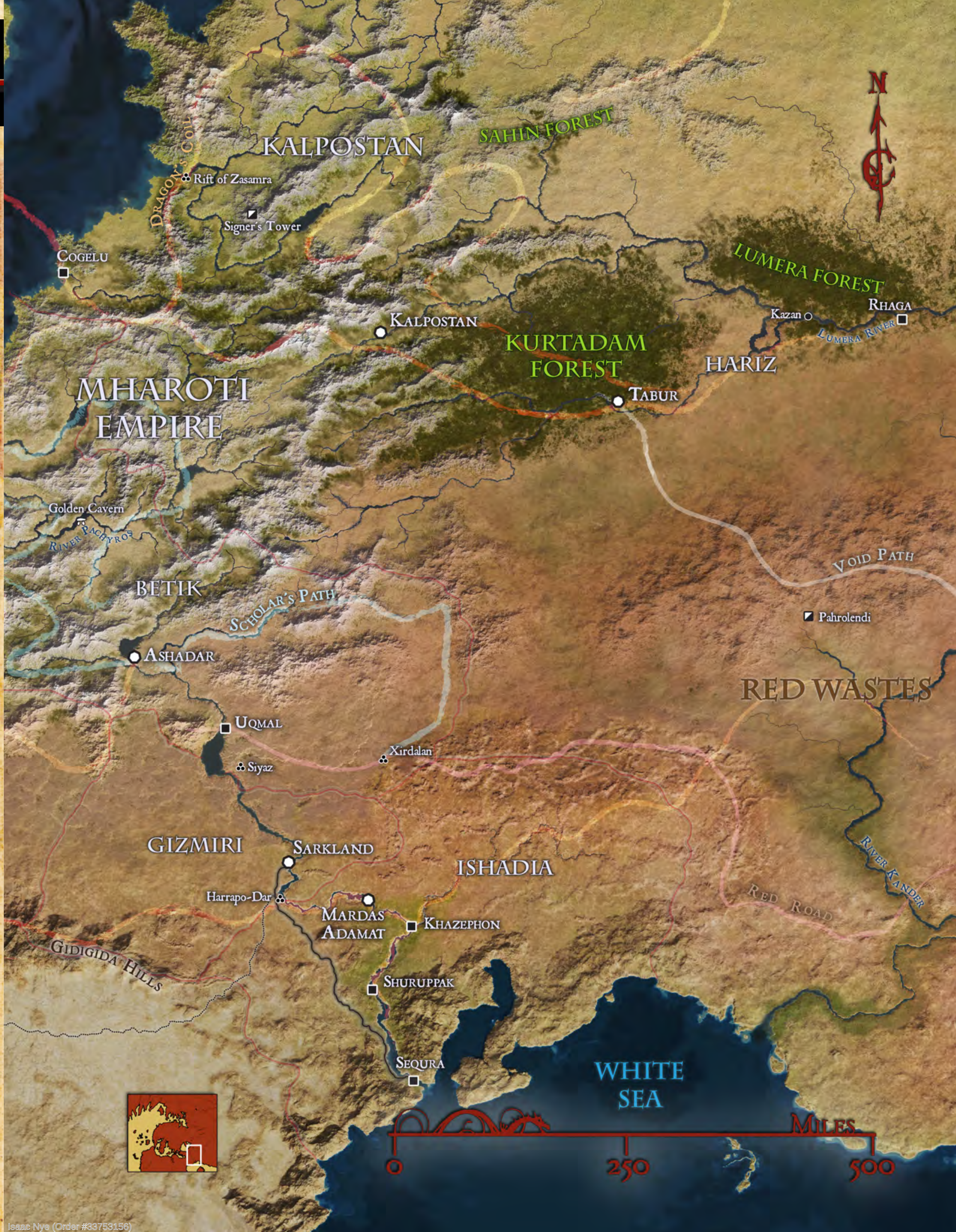
PARTHIA AND THE RED WASTES

Parthia is a vassal state of the Mharoti, ruled by humans but paying tribute directly to the Dragon Empire. The dragons have long considered simply conquering it outright, but it hardly seems worth the trouble when Parthia already pays fine tribute, worships the dragon gods as elemental deities—and provides a useful buffer against Khandiria and the horse tribes of the Qaen and Rothenian Plain.

South of Parthia are the Red Wastes, where Khandiria and the Mharoti wheel armies in great marches and fight enormous battles. Shattered war wagons and tattered flags, abandoned bones and dragonkin skeletons and human zombies are common; necromancers find endless supplies of the dead for their black magic here. Ghosts, unmoored spells, and the haunted battlefields make it a place of few villages and little water, food, or shelter. Gnoll tribes thrive, pledging their loyalty for only the briefest periods.

CITIES AND LOCATIONS

Parthians are primarily merchants and artisans who live by trade and industry, making gold and silk fabrics of every kind. They also breed excellent horses, sold to the neighboring nations as pack animals capable of the journey "from Cathay to Nuria" (as they say).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Sahin Forest
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Dragon's Coil
Rift of Zasamra
Signer's Tower
Cogelu
Lumera Forest
Rhaga
Kazan
Lumera River
Kalpostan
Kurtadam Forest
Hariz
Tabur
Mharoti Empire
Golden Cavern
River Pachyros
Void Path
Betik
Scholar's Path
Pahrolendi
Ashadar
Red Wastes
Uqmal
Xirdalan
Siyaz
Gizmiri
Sarkland
Ishadia
River Kander
Harrapo-Dar
Red Road
Mardas Adamat
Khazephon
Gidigida Hills
Shuruppak
Sequra
White Sea
Miles
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[redacted]

as prone to feuds as the Beldestani but quick to take offense. They are also extremely kind and gracious hosts to travelers and merchants; their feuds they keep among themselves. Even their bandits are easily swayed to offer hospitality for a few silvers if a merchant can prove he comes from farther away than the Mharoti lands. They feel a duty to be cordial to merchants and distant strangers while they hold no such obligation to near neighbors and fellow Parthians.

Isphahan: A city surrounded by huge and fragrant orchards of apricots, dates, and cherries, Isphahan in the spring is a cool oasis on the trade routes. Its stout walls are held together with enchanted stone, and its blue and purple towers offer a tremendous view over the plains and the river. Great temples at the city's center surround the Ruby Palace of his majesty, King Dalil.

Rhaga: Westernmost city of Parthia and home to a great temple built around the fire stone of Atashkala, a sky stone that offered prophecies, healing, and visions to the devout. Rhaga is also home of the Collegium Elemental, which teaches the magi of the realm the mastery of wind, earth, and fire. The collegium also produces *voidfire orbs*, enchanted iron spheres set with rubies that can call down a *flame strike* (as the spell), though each orb is consumed in the process.

Mardis: Famous for its horse fair, silks, and ability to keep Rothenian centaurs and Khazzaki visitors from rioting too often. The archery contest held at the fair offers the prize of a golden circlet to the best shot and is hotly contested by centaurs, human devotees of Azuran, and occasionally windrunner elves. Mardis is governed by Lord of the Pass, Shapour Kalpostani, a dragonkin priest who keeps his home in an underground cavern-shrine to his god and who rarely appears in daylight.

Qaen: Home of Parthia's largest gold and copper mines, Qaen is well defended by both humans and dragonkin. Without it, paying tribute to the Mharoti might be

and defender against the occasional Beldestani raid.

The Red Wastes

South of Parthia, between the Mharoti and the Khandirians, lies a vast desert of reddish sand, small villages, and bones, together with a smattering of dust goblins, dragonkin deserters, gnoll tribes, and a ghuls. While the ley lines there are nowhere near as snarled as those of the Western Wastes, the place is a dry and inhospitable place to fight major battles.

Halls of the Cobra: A fortress of bandits that the Mharoti have never bothered to claim permanently, the halls are held by a ghoulish death cult devoted to Vardesain. Its lack of dependable water makes it a poor stronghold at best, though this does not bother the grey thirsters and skeletons that are its main population.

Black Lion Castle: Intermittently held by Mharoti troops, this castle is haunted by otherworldly hounds and peculiar luminous oozes. Many of its halls lead elsewhere, allowing demons to wander in from distant hells.

Dorin's Tower: A strong fortress built by Nurian dwarves long ago, Dorin's Tower has clean water, sturdy walls, and small orchards of figs and herds of pigs. A vicious tribe of desert demons and gnolls devoted to Laughing Nkishi (see the *Southlands Worldbook*) rules the place these days and is said to eat rude or weak visitors. Chieftain Smiling Sharmaga (NE male gnoll fighter 13) has kept power for years, despite being a blustering cheat, because he always provides whatever army shows up on his doorstep with water, provender, and shelter. He carries a *bag of holding* that contains his vast fortune as well as 20 enchanted skulls of his enemies.

Ruins of Al-Eddar: Once a thriving city known for teas, a mathematical academy, and excellent mulberry papers, Al-Eddar fell into ruin after one of its high lectors offended a priest of Khandiria by spurning his lovelorn entreaties. His mouth full of lies, he convinced the Great

[redacted]

Adventures in Parthia

Most adventures here involve rich caravans, the elemental powers of the gods, or temple thievery (Parthia's temples are famous for their wealth).

- Someone has invaded the cavern-shrine of Shapour Kalpostani and copied of some of the most sacred writings of the dragon god of runes and earth. Shapour is infuriated and wants the thief and blasphemer found, and the writings burnt.
- A silk caravan was slaughtered by Beldestani ghouls. A counter-raid is called for to Bastun's Hold, where the adventurers are to ambush a mithral mule train traveling down from the hills to Qaen.
- An entire centaur tribe has arrived in Mardis and set up its tents for the winter—and refuses to pay for anything. Adventurers are asked to negotiate a solution or convince the Moon Spider tribe to find other

[redacted]

Raj of Khandiria that the city was rebellious. It maintain a small garrison in a lookout tower, and a mourning company of gravediggers and priests. The flocks of a sma shrine to Sampiri, Lord of Vultures, devour the bodies of high-caste Khandirians slain in the Wastes.

Forbidden Mountains of Beldestan

Beldestan is a high, arid land with little more than goats and pastures—and mines filled with mithral and iron fo those strong enough to hold them. For long ages, it was the heart of the dwarven Trakhan Kingdom, a place of great industry and dozens of well-fortified hill fortresses and clan halls dug deep into the hills. In more recent yea the dwarves' rule fell to banditry and dark magic, and the clans abandoned the mines for the Towers of Khubara. Several human hill tribes took over the ruins and kept its mines open, though only by allying themselves with forc of darkness.

The Satrapy of Beldestan has become a place of casual violence and constant feuding. The families kill and betra one another as entertainment, and tribal loyalties run deep. The ruling noble houses—Bastun, Yllomir, Kluchis and Plendremin—largely prefer to make their slaves do the mining, and all travelers are considered fair game as free labor. Mine owners and petty lordlings hire gnolls a dwarves as slavers, many of whom have settled in the citi and ruins of Beldestan.

Slaving, goat-stealing, bride-theft, and kidnapping are all common in Beldestan. Those who cannot keep their families safe are mocked as weaklings and cowards.

Dark Temples and Ancient Wisdo

Beldestan is known for being one of those rare places that praises dark gods openly and with great gusto. The Beldestanis consider their pantheon stronger and more practical than the high-minded angels or rapacious drag gods of nearby kingdoms. Human sacrifices are part of everyday life in Beldestan, for its priesthoods demand blood and treasure in return for their blessings. Beldesta is fiercely loyal to a range of dark gods and has built temples to a dark Veles of the Void as well as to Khorsa, t Sabateus, and much darker gods still—darakhul monks and dhampir priests are rare but not unknown. Few linger long in Beldestan: the weak are bundled off to mine iron or mithral until they die, and the strong seize what they can and leave for more congenial pastures.

Kingdom of Parthia

Symbol: A red eagle on a white field

Ruler: King of the Fire Kingdom, Master of Phoenixes, and Keeper of the Sacred Fires of Baal, His Majesty Dalil Yazdan (N male human cleric 10 [Baal])

Important Personages: First Counselor Talgemesh Firemouth (LN male human); Keeper of Coin Parisda Mazdaki (LE female human); Defender of Qaen, Fortunate Gordafareed (NE female human); Windspeaker Dariosh (LN male human); Lord of the Pass, Shapour Kalpostani (LE male dragonborn), High Lector of the Collegium Elemental, Jaaduu-gar Behistun [N male human)

Population: 310,000 humans, 20,000 dragonkin, 10,500 gnolls, 6,000 kobolds, 2,000 ogres, 500 trollkin

Capital: Isphahan, population 22,500 (18,000 humans, 2,000 dragonkin, 1,000 centaurs, 700 gnolls, 500 kobolds)

Cities: Rhaga, population 12,000 (9,000 humans, 2,000 dragonkin, 1,000 kobolds), Mardis, population 9,500 (7,000 humans, 1,000 dragonkin, 1,000 gnolls, 500 centaurs); Qaen, population 7,300 (6,500 human, 500 dragonkin, 300 darakhul)

Town: Stone Hill, population 3,000 (2,000 humans, 1,000 dwarves)

Great Gods: Azura (Azuran, patron), Astarte (Lada), Baal, Bastet, Khespotan, Quorzu (Khors)

Trade Goods: Gold, silk, horses, dates, pistachios, copper, iron, cotton, sheep

Sky Stairs of Beldestan

Beldestan has long been a site of pilgrimage, a direct route from dusty earth up to the heavens where enormous creatures soar and carry sacrifices to the gods. The base of its monumental stairs is well known for the efficacy of the invocations offered there, but very few other than the most faithful dare venture up the stairs themselves: enormous eagles, howling winds, and various inimical undead make the stairs a place that few find congenial for long.

Those who climb the full height and return, however, are favored in the eyes of the gods, and accomplishing such a feat is a daring and worthy endeavor. Many have set off for the heights but few have returned, somewhat scarred and sometimes wiser for the effort.

True heroes might have several reasons to climb the stairs:

- To acquire a quiver full of roc feathers at a mage's request
- To prove their worthiness to an order of champions
- To reach the meadow of stones where a powerful drake shares prophecies
- To visit a great void dragon's citadel at the edge of the Void and sail the astral winds
- To carry a message to an archmage who lives at the top of the stairs, a member of house Plendremin

TOWERS OF KHUBARA

On Beldestan's northern border, beyond most of the ruins that dot its landscape, the dwarf descendants of Trakhan live in one small city-state high in the steppes, flanked by towering mountain peaks and paying a nominal tribute to the Satrapy of Beldestan. The Towers of Khubara is a mixed nation of dwarves, humans, and a scattering of other local races. The city of Khubara is formed primarily of tall towers, and those who dwell there take the height of their dwelling as a matter of pride and status. Bridges and walkways span the gaps between the towers, and a traveler can walk from one side of the city to another and never touch the ground.

The skilled artisans here produce many goods for trade with Beldestan and beyond, including the swiftest falcons in the world. Smaller than peregrines, they have red feathers on their breasts and are famed for their speed and skill. Turquoise is found in great abundance in these mountains, as are plentiful seams of iron, mithral, and a unique form of metal called ada, which is used to make wave-washed steel.

ADANISK OR ADA (WAVE-WASHED STEEL)

Adanisk is a very rare type of steel that has a unique wave-like pattern and is light, flexible, and very strong.

When crafted from iron, ada metal, and natural woods, wave-washed steel becomes a wonderful material from which to create beautiful weapons. Armor is almost never crafted from adanisk. Other items not primarily of metal are not meaningfully affected by being partially made of adanisk. (A longsword can be a wave-washed weapon, while a staff cannot.) On a critical hit, weapons made of this form of steel can shatter part of an opponent's shield or armor, reducing their AC by 1 until it is repaired.

GALNA

The capital city is home to a dozen sites of great power and great horror: the enigmatic Knotted Ley Line of Galna puzzles all arcanists, but also of note are the gambling halls in the Cloud Temple of Azuran, the Blood Caverns of Vardesain, and the Echoing Cathedral of Veles, visited by emissaries from the Mharoti lands (who tend to depart quickly once their offerings are made). In addition, the monthly rites of the Goat of the Woods are considered either horrific or strangely attractive to visitors: they take the form of something like a public orgy in the Horned Temple of the Ebon Moon, though invariably several of the participants are never heard from again.

At its heart is the vast palace called the Seat of Beldes Wisdom, a marble-halled home to the Autarch Alestos and his harem of 33 beautiful men, women, catfolk, gnolls, and (so it is said) doppelgangers able to take the form of gods or devils with equal ease. Some of these are wives with status, others are gifts from kingdoms as far away as Sailendra and Nuria Natal, and others are ambassadors or travelers unfortunate enough to catch Alestos's eye and retained as little more than prisoners.

The Seat of Beldes Wisdom surrounds and is interpenetrated by the Indigo Halls of Sabateus, the temple of the mysterious Void-ridden god of stars and magic who is much loved by the autarch and many of the realm's wealthiest bandits, dukes, and archmages. The Indigo Halls are home to the immensely powerful Khatun Bibi Kaftar, sometimes called the Empress of Beldestan, and she rules the spiritual life of the satrapy with a stern predilection for law and order.

The Indigo Halls of Galna house more than 400 priests and priestesses of various degrees of wisdom, from the Indigo initiates to the blind seers and devoted souls of the elder ranks. The priesthood makes its way among the Indigo Halls through Living Doorways, hallways, and entire rooms decorated in silver mirrors and studded with star-like ceilings made of gems and lapis lazuli. A hundred ghosts and phantoms of the priests buried in its walls watch over the kingdom, and magic mouths and similar spells discourage petty thievery of its gems, sacred scrolls, and mummified relics.

TOWNS AND SITES

Beldestan is littered with hundreds of tiny villages, freeholds, and crossroad towns, each protective of its special status, its road taxes, and its peculiar traditions, from the cultivation of ebon frogs to the trepanation of blasphemers to outright slavery. Here are a few of its larger steadings, familial strongholds, and sites.

ARTAONA: An ancient human capital, now in ruins. Once home to tens of thousands, it now houses a few hundred looters in enormous galleries and empty granaries. Yak

SATRAPY OF BELDESTAN

Symbol: A blue field set with three golden eyes

Ruler: Autarch and Most Puissant Magus of the Darkening Heavens, First Speaker of the Void, Beloved of Veles and Sabateus, King of the Mountains, Keeper of the Stairs, Ozymandrite Alestos the First (NE male human wizard 19)

Important Personages: First Counselor Yrsinestra the Wise (LE female adult void dragon); Chamberlain of the Stairs Olessy Plendremin (CE male human); Shalena of the Seven Fists (NE female human); High Eclipse-lord Rugansta Yllomir (LE male human); Tarpin the Black (LE male darakhul); Khatun Bibi Kaftar, Indigo Heirophant, Beloved of Sabateus (LN female human)

Population: 184,000 humans, 20,500 gnolls, 15,000 dwarves, 5,000 goblins, 4,000 darakhul, 2,000 gnomes

Capital: Galna, population 10,200 (9,000 humans, 700 gnolls, 500 goblins)

City: Bastun's Hold, population 8,500 (7,000 humans, 1,000 darakhul, 500 gnolls)

Towns: Kulchiss, population 6,000 (4,500 human, 1,000 dwarves, 500 gnolls); Ur-Trakhan, population 5,000 (2,000 humans, 3,000 dwarves)

Great Gods: Azuran, Goat of the Woods, Sabateus, Vardesain, Veles of the Void

Trade Goods: Turquoise, lapis lazuli, iron, mithral, ada, poppy juice and resin, indigo, barley, sheep, goats, carpets (in order of total output)

herders and shepherds bring their flocks into the city fo shelter during cold winter storms. Rumors claim some monster devours humans and dwarves in the city.

Bastun's Hold: A family of human mining barons too over the richest of the Al Trakhar dwarven mithral mine here and has kept it in their hands for three generations. The city is half on the surface and half in dwarven halls repurposed for human heights and decorations. A dwarven gatehouse called the Giant's Skull has become t seat of power and counting house where precious metal are stored. The local warlord, the Khan Jan Sardhana al-Bastun (LE male human fighter 12) is a follower of Vardesain and feeds troublemakers to a deep pit called the Pit of Ghouls. It is said that many of his helmeted guards are not human but simply darakhul, expanding t Hunger God's power here. The bodies of Khan Sardhan enemies disappear without any trace, and priests of god of sun, life, and justice rarely survive a visit to Bastun.

Everfall: A mountain monastery devoted to the wors of Azuran. Its chief monk is the human child Tsundue, called Wind's Brother, who recently inherited the mantl as a prophet of Azuran. Though young, he shows great wisdom, and the older monks are fiercely protective. Th chanting at Everfall never stops, and its monks sometim carry on their duties long after their deaths.

Giant Throne: An abandoned fortress guarding against the spiders of Leng, now sometimes held by the folk of Leng and sometimes abandoned. Said to be an observatory with runes explicating the transformation of dragons into stars, and stars into gods. A site of mysti pilgrimages.

Grove of Silence: Also called the Bleating Grove or the Grove of Bitter Bliss, this forested mountain valley i largely uninhabited by humanoids. The primary residen are selang, or "dark satyrs," devoted to the worship of the Goat of the Woods and similar dark gods. The sound of their pipes under the dark branches keeps mos woodcutters at bay, and the small shrine on the forest's one good path is heaped with the hearts of sheep, birds, and other animals. The leader of the selang is a young and cheerful captain of his forest band, deeply fond of th dragonpipe and called the Devourer of Secrets. He visit Galna once each month to lead the revels there, always seeking to ensnare priests or priestesses of Sabateus.

House of Dreams: A fortified town where the harvest of fields of Yallomena are transformed into usable paste powder, and potions. Ruled by the darakhul monk and warlord Shahar Al-Azarani, who is said to move swifter than the wind itself. Al-Azarani is sometimes thought to be a rival or a suitor to the high priestess Khatun Bibi Kaftar.

Isquetta: A thriving town and the largest city in western Khandiria, Isquetta is home to an enormous shrine to the elephant god Maraut, an armory where the forges never go out, and a set of red brick fortresses and towers that keep mighty river makes it a hub of trade and travel. Isquetta's powerful governor is almost always a blood relation of the rajah, a guarantee lest the city's armies and wealth tempt the inhabitants to attempt independence. A guild of assassins called the Weeping Ghosts serves the Lord Major Quwenti Raavaga, who currently rules with a practical, wise government for artisans and the poor, and a darker rule of terror, disappearances, and threats against any rival—independent nobles, the wealthy, and religious foes.

Kulchiss and the Kulchiss Pass: A mithral mine has kept some dwarves occupied in this high mountain town where snow is common for eight months of the year and the shepherds and miners yet retain a fierce joy in life. The town is known for its talented musicians as well as for banditry, metalwork, and a devotion to raiding "lowlanders"—the town has always been on the verge of rebellion, and the arrival of its taxes to the autarch seem perpetually in doubt. However, in years where no wealth is forthcoming, the citizens of Kulchiss do not mock or belittle the autarch but merely claim that the "mountain's share" was given to otherworldly creatures on the peaks of Mount Ashatabar. The autarch has never mounted a punitive expedition against Kulchiss, though he has been known to demand additional soldiers from Kulchiss to serve in the ranks of his armies.

Mountain Gate: Guarding the primary pass up onto the heights of the Plateau of Leng, this enormous fortress is guarded at all hours by keen-eyed archers, both human and dwarven, and reinforced by a priesthood of Baal and a monastic order of Vardesain, both devoted to destroying all creatures of Leng that attempt to pass through the gate. Tarpin the Black personally leads the warriors of Vardesain.

Plendress: Home of the Plendremin family of wizards, sorcerers, and oracles, the family stronghold is a castle built on a large plateau accessible only from the air or through tunnels dug into the rock. They keep a stable of hippogriffs and a small breeding colony of rocs (fed on taxes levied in sheep and goats). Their command of the air and their swift passage from one place to another causes many to believe they are servants of Boreas or Azuran.

Red Fields of Yallomena: These fields grow poppies in vast swaths, watched carefully by the priests of Veles by day and by a cadre of extremely devout gnoll-ragers of Veles by night. When harvested and distilled into a gummy resin, the resulting tinctures and pipesmoke are found throughout Beldestan in smoker's dens and thieves' quarters. The addictive, lethargic, dream-inducing material is commonly referred to as "dragonsmoke" or a "dragonpipe."

The Witch Tree: In the foothills of Beldestan stands one of the massive World Trees, though its inhabitants are a bit different than those found elsewhere. The Witch Tree is miles tall with a wide spreading canopy reminiscent of a banyan tree, and its branches and roots hide passages into the wider planes beyond the mortal world. It is the home of Vashnaya the Swift and Wise, Mistress of Wind and Sky, and the Monkey King and his vanara followers. Passersby hear strange lights and music from the lower branches at the dark of the moon, and explorers claim that the Witch Tree's reaches extend to lands of high mountain snow. Many small shrines dot its roots, carved from its bark and wood, gnarled but pure and holy. Its wood is treasured for amulets against darkness.

Despotate of the Ruby Sea

The Despotate of the Ruby Sea is a curse among the free wandering folk of the Rothenian Plain and a peculiar neighbor to the Dragon Empire.

The Rubeshi are slavers and aggressive, malevolent folk, always seeking their own gain, and all other nations be damned. Their hair is black as their hearts, and Rubeshi eyes are green and pitiless. They sell to anyone: to the gnomes, the Tsar of Vidim, the priests of Baal. The Rubeshi do not play favorites.

Founded by a single man, Veltrin the First, the despotate holds the peninsula in the sea that gives the nation its name, standing against infrequent attacks by centaur and Khazzaki hordes. Small in numbers, rich in gemstones and in vices, the despotate is reviled by all its neighbors. Only the Mharoti Empire has the power to crush it, but so far, the Rubeshi have avoided that fate. However, the Dread Sultan has recently sent demands for tribute—demands that have been ignored.

The Rubeshi care nothing for the disdain of their neighbors. Each summer, the people of the despotate ride forth with their wagons, nets, and branding irons to capture new slaves and workers for their fields, mines, and—worst of all—for the chained banks of oars that power the despotate's war galleys, the engines that keep the Mharoti Empire at bay. The Rubeshi call them bondservants, but to anyone with eyes to see, they are slaves and nothing more.

Slaves and the Army of Madness

The Despot Veltrin is cruel, but he offers small mercies and false hope to the slaves who serve him. When seriously threatened, though—which has happened twice, once by the Mharoti dragonkin and once by an alliance of windrunning elves and Khazzaki horse tribes—he can create an army of fearsome proportions. By offering blood sacrifices to the White Goddess, the despot turns his slaves into strong, hulking, bloodthirsty warriors. They grow fangs, their skin turns a hideous pallid green, and their strength rivals that of a full-grown centaur. In a matter of days, the despotate can raise an army of slavering soldiers who obey and fight like demons.

Fortunately, the *Ritual of Ravening* strengthens the subjects only for a time, less than a month or two at most. After this period they grow listless, and the horde-soldiers die in droves, choking and hacking as their flesh wastes away. As long as they have destroyed the invading army before then, the despot counts it worth the cost, but the loss of valuable slaves prevents him from conquering all nations around him in this way.

Captains and their Ships

The despotate is full of horrors, most of them hidden within palace walls and kept off the streets (the public floggings and executions are tame by comparison). Veltrin's favorites—the nobles called the captains—oversee lands and villages of their own. Each captain commands one or more of the red-sailed fleets of the Rubeshi, their ships not as famous as the king's ship *Golden Bird* but justly feared. The more experienced captains are all rich and powerful, and their soldiers share in the wealth. It is an oppressive system built on human misery, and the rulers enjoy themselves.

For their ships, on the other hand, no expense is spared. *The Red Griffon* has a bound troll at its prow, and the creature is fed the weakest or most disobedient rower before setting out, to encourage the others. *The Moaning Monk* has a dragonkin elementalist bound to its mast, who must summon moaning winds to carry the ship forward through the night when the slaves rest.

The most famous ships are all bound magically to their owners, and only the captains know how to control them with blood, demonic commands, or arcane spells. Among the slaves, it is said a ship dies with its captain. The Rubeshi are oddly proud of this loyalty by their nightmare ships, bound to hellish pacts with their masters. The Khazzaki consider the custom akin to slaughtering a favorite war horse at a khan's grave: grim but entirely respectable. In the case of the dark ships of the Rubeshi, demons tear f
from the blood-stained prows, howling as the ship sink

The smarter captains hand out rewards to their most
loyal and useful thralls, typically better food, decent clothes, and authority over lesser slaves. The tools of obedience can also be more subtle and more powerful:
spell of magical healing, a night of simple entertainme
release from the galley oars for a time, lessons for a slav
children, a chance to pray at a temple—even simple res
and sleep can be powerful rewards. Slaves who row day
after day can be bought for a crust of fresh bread and a
of wine. The despot knows this and depends on it. Velt
kindnesses can be cruelties of a kind, preserving the la
best slaves for the next fight.

GOVERNMENT: THE DESPOT

Veltrin the Glittering King rules from his jeweled palac
Reth-Saal's lord is steeped in luxury and wine, a drunka
with a great temper, deep paranoia, and tremendous po
over his terrified nobles. He mastered the brassy demon
figurehead of his flagship, *Golden Bird*, about 25 years ag
and murdered his wife during the ship's launch.

Veltrin frequently hosts gnoll mercenaries and even
children or simulacra of the Master of Demon Mounta
in his court, and he speaks highly of Eldara, one of Bab
Yaga's daughters. He grows increasingly stubborn and rapacious, raiding the shores of the sea and the city of Orkasa and Sephaya with some regularity, as well as daring to raid Kaa'nesh, Cogelu, and even the distant Parthian cities from time to time, just to give his soldiers exercise. Nobles who dared to oppose him have been transformed into his flesh golem bodyguards, and Veltrin's complete control over the despotate is never questioned.

Veltrin has long worn a mithral mask studded with rubies, sapphires, and chalcedony. Some say that below it, his flesh has been sculpted and renewed through arcane regeneration so often that it now resembles the wrinkled green hide of a troll. Those spreading these lies within hearing of the captains or Veltrin's gnolls lose their tongues.

The Elect

One of the early victories that cemented Veltrin's rule was the Boyar's Rebellion. During this revolt, a dozen of his ship captains and one of his generals plotted an assassination, intending to share Reth-Saal's growing riches among themselves. Warned by the Master of Demon Mountain, Veltrin knew of the plot and called his ship's demon ashore. It summoned a dozen more to defend him against the assassins.

When the plot fell apart, Veltrin first executed the plotters, then stitched their bodies into the first of the Elect: flesh golems who serve as his bodyguards with unshakeable loyalty. Creating them took years and a fortune, but seeing former generals and powerful galley

DESPOTATE OF THE RUBY SEA

Ruler: Admiral and Despot of Reth-Saal, Honest and Rightful King of the Plains, Master of the Ruby Sea, Lord of Land and Sky, Veltrin the Younger, Veltrin the Glittering King (NE male human fighter 15)

Important Personages: Zaganos the Red, Grand Marshall of the Ruby Sea (LE male tiefling); Captain Noorasti of the Red Griffon (CE vrock); Captain Arianos the Mad of the Moaning Monk (CE male human); Captain Fyogrim the Pale of the Lost Moon (LE male human); Darputin Valshek, captain of the Keepers of Order (LE male human [antipaladin, see Appendix]); Faulietta, called Foxglove, Mistress of Coin and Daughter of Demon Mountain (LE female tiefling)

Population: 36,000 humans, 3,500 gnolls

Capital: Reth-Saal, population 14,400 (14,000 humans, 250 gnolls, 100 dragonkin, 50 flesh golems)

Towns: Monk's Harbor, population (1,500 humans, 50 gnolls), Uratu, population (1,000 humans, 100 gnolls)

Castles: Tokmarcale, Zinjancale

Great Gods: Chernobog, Mavros, Marena, Svarog (Volund), the White Goddess

Trade Goods: Slaves, horses, amber, furs, mead, gemstones (chalcedony, carnelians, sard)

commanders jump at his every word amuses Veltrin still, and the golems terrify his enemies. Over the years, his most powerful rivals and enemies have been "promoted" to join the Elect. Reliable sources claim that more than 30 of them serve the despot, and perhaps as many as 50. All wear rich but functional armor and are armed with various magical weapons and devices. No coup has been attempted in more than 20 years.

Zaganos, the Bloody Hand of the King

Fear is a powerful tool, and no one wields this tool better than Zaganos the Red, Grand Marshall of the Ruby Sea and Kadtan-i Derya (First Captain of the Ruby Sea). Those who have seen him on the deck of the *Morning Star* wonder which is the most fearsome: the ship, the demon bound to her, or her captain, whose infernal bloodline takes on a new dimension in this terrible place. Many believe Zaganos revealed his fellow captains' plot against Veltrin during the Boyar's Rebellion, though none dare level that accusation.

Those who spot this tall, emaciated man brandishing his infamous black bardiche, at the end of a monstrous arm befitting a mongrelman, with his cape of human skin flapping in the wind . . . well, many cower below decks and pray to the gods they love best. Zaganos serves Veltrin loyally, though some say he merely bides his time until he can find a way to dispose of the Glittering King's bodyguards.

Reth-Saal, the City of Jewels

Known for its slave market that provides slaves and human flesh to the Mharoti Empire's nobility, the city of Reth-Saal is one of pillars and whitewashed walls, a relatively warm and hospitable city surrounded by well-tended fields and boasting an excellent sheltered harbor and lighthouse. The walls of the Carnidine Palace glitter with cut glass (though the despot claims them to be gemstones) and the streets are patrolled by the Keepers of Order, a militia that has grown into a full-fledged set of guards, informers, and spies. Dissent is not tolerated, and the sycophancy and wild declarations of loyalty to King Veltrin and to Zaganos and the other lords can be excessive. Hearing the endless toasts to the king is the price of doing business in Reth-Saal; failure to toast frequently enough is noted.

The city is small by most standards, contained in a stout wall of earth and timber with tall stone towers. It is surrounded by marshy ground unsuitable for a siege. It commands a fine harbor and has a single lighthouse, called Veltrin's Eye. The ships that dock include fast raiders as well as friendly or neutral vessels from around the Ruby Sea. The waterfront is notorious for its open sale of opium and brandy as well as for the callous manner in which new slaves are broken to their newfound misery: branding, lashing, and even the amputation of toes and tongues are public spectacles in Reth-Saal.

The Demon Ship Golden Bird

The slaving fleet of the Rubeshi is widely feared: its black and red sails are a sign of doom to small fishing villages around the Ruby Sea, and even larger towns have been raided by the despot's fleet. The secret of its

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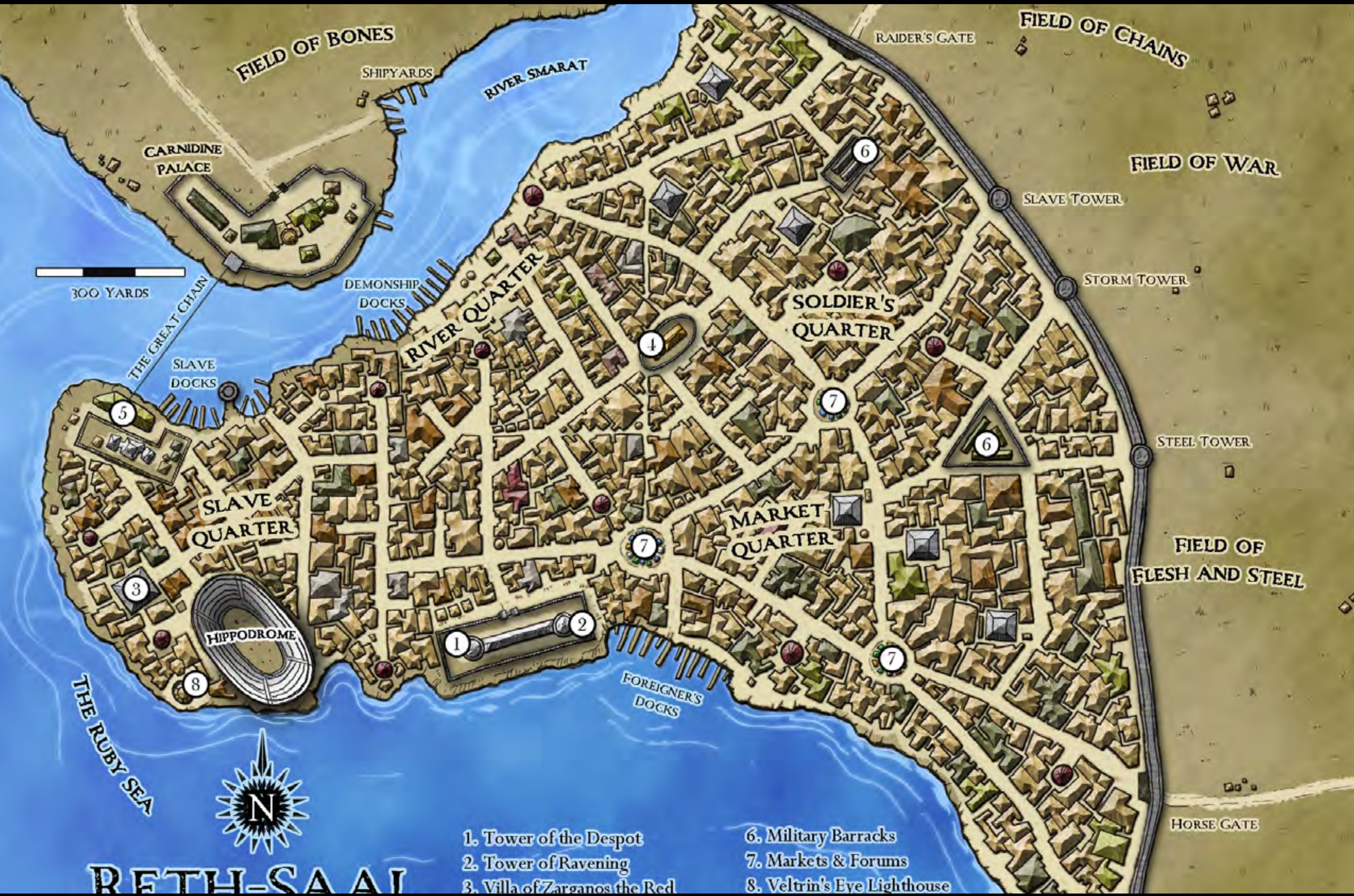
Field of Bones
Shipyards
River Smarat
Raider's Gate
Field of Chains
Carnidine Palace
300 Yards
The Great Chain
Demonship Docks
River Quarter
Slave Docks
Soldier's Quarter
Field of War
Slave Tower
Storm Tower
Steel Tower
Slave Quarter
Market Quarter
Field of Flesh and Steel
Hippodrome
Foreigner's Docks
The Ruby Sea
Horse Gate
N
Reth-Saal
1. Tower of the Despot
2. Tower of Ravening
3. Villa of Zarganos the Red
6. Military Barracks
7. Markets & Forums
8. Veltrin's Eye Lighthouse
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

[redacted]

[redacted]

is more than a vessel; the figurehead at its prow is a bound demon named Yarochort, a horrific figure draped in rusty chains. Veltrin the Elder found this figurehead in a wreck washed ashore and realized its power. He had no idea how to command it, but he knew how to find out: ask Baba Yaga. And so he did and learned the art of commanding demons, and his fate was sealed. The despot went to the Master of Demon Mountain for a demon of his own and paid yet another price, in blood and flesh for 100 years. In return, the master gave him a bottle of dark demonic wine. Once the figurehead was anointed with its purple stain, the demon was transferred into the ship.

With a compass of brass that could find other ships at sea and a demon to lead the boarding parties, things went well indeed. Soon Veltrin's pirate ship became the terror

them to pay his debt to the Master of Demon Mountain, selling them to Vidim as serfs or to dragons as food or to gnomes as sacrifices, and putting them to work laying the foundation stones of Reth-Saal. The city's harbor, fortress, and streets were all mortared with blood and sweat from captured slaves, and the despot was never known for mercy. Those who could not work were fed to demons.

Rumors say that the demon's contract expired when Veltrin the Elder died, and Veltrin the Younger made a pilgrimage to Demon Mountain to renew it. The truth is that Veltrin never died at all but merely moved into a new body, and thus the despotate remains ruled by its founder. The contract's terms have not been disclosed, but one of the master's daughters is the Mistress of Coin in Reth-Saal, and chests of gold are shipped north every spring.

[redacted]

creature, think of all this? It hates the despot, hates the Master of Demon Mountain, and takes out its rage on the ships and dragons of the Mharoti every chance it gets. The captains of the fleet believe that a single magical word by Veltrin releases the demon, letting it off the chain and into havoc. This mayhem rarely leaves survivors, and it might be that Veltrin spreads the rumor of the word to stoke fear among his captains and galley slaves alike.

The fleet captains are less sure whether a word exists that recalls the demon Yarochort to its chains—it might be freed once it no longer fights on the flagship. Losing the demon would spell the end of the despot's maritime dominance, which might explain his coziness with sorcery and the creation of ever more of the Elect.

OTHER LOCALES IN THE DESPOTATE

Slaver's castles and a system of farms and fishing villages ensure the despotate can defend and feed itself.

MONK'S HARBOR: A town devoted to fishing and to a small shrine to Chernobog, the god of darkness. A portion

nihilistic cult that seeks to blot out the sun, but Veltrin arrests and executes the cult leaders every few years lest they make too much progress in their goal.

TOKMARCALE: This castle holds the peninsula against centaurs, Khazzaki, and others who might raid the Glittering King's Lands. Its commander is Ilgiz the Slayer, a devout follower of the Hunter. He revels in slaughter of horses, saiga antelopes, and even flocks of migrating birds. The priestess Golnaz encourages him in these sacrifices, and the walls of Tokmarcale are decorated with thousands of skulls and horns, and its hallways strewn with a fortune in pelts.

URATU, TOWN OF SLAVERS: A waypoint for slaves captured on the Rothenian Plain; much of the city is devoted to making shackles and training captured humans in what their masters expect of them.

ZINJANCALE: Like Tokmarcale, this castle defends the peninsula from raiders by land. Its commander, Mintimer, is nicknamed the Iron Chieftain not for his armor but for the discipline and loyalty he has forged in his followers.

BORDER RAIDS

he despotate is both the source of incursions into and the rget of raids from the Rothenian Plain. The Rubeshi seek o capture human slaves of any sort, generally through areful scouting of Khazzaki tribes that venture close to the Ruby Sea or known camping spots along the great rivers of the plain. However, when the tribes stir to anger, they call on their centaur friends and attempt to plunder the despotate, stealing away grain and fattened livestock in late summer and fall. These raids fall on the despotate in force, meant to bottle up the Rubeshi castles while razing the countryside. These ruthless attacks burn out villages, destroy small granaries and lookout towers, and (when most successful) drive hundreds or even thousands of animals toward the plain. Occasionally, the Khazzaki give their friends in Perunalia a hint that it might be a good time to sail a raiding ship from Sephaya to recover captives. The least successful such raids lack the element of surprise; in a fateful turnabout, hundreds of raiders might be captured and enslaved by the waiting Rubeshi.

[redacted]

to the king include the following:

- "To our glorious shining king, master of men, binder of demon, may his hand never falter and his whip always rise!"
- "To King Veltrin, may he live a thousand years and a thousand more!"
- "Drink to slaves, for they make us rich and the king happy! Happiness, glory, and riches to King Veltrin, now and forever!"

It is impossible to be excessive in such a toast. A Charisma (Performance or Persuasion) ability check is required if the toast is made in public or in front of members of the Rubeshi nobility. The DC varies but should be no less than 15.

[redacted]

[redacted]

ADVENTURES IN THE DESPOTATE

Adventures in the Despotate typically involve slavery, huge treasures, and black magic.

- Rescue a recently enslaved character from a demon-haunted ship, where he is chained to the oars.
- Prevent the Ritual of Ravening from turning an entire Khazzaki camp into an army, ready to hurl against Kaa'nesh or some difficult centaur chieftain.
- Visit the Monk's Harbor and destroy an evil relic of a bloodthirsty god of the sea, one that may command

[redacted]

SOUTHLANDS

6

Beyond the southern shores of the Middle Sea lies a vast continent of mystery and adventure—the Southlands. Here the brave and the bold can travel across the burning sands, battle demonic cults, and explore lost cities and cursed tombs in the hopes of finding riches beyond their imagination. For many, though, only a slow and painful death awaits beneath the pitiless sun.

The Southlands is a huge continent, over 2,000 miles long. Here you will find overviews of the kingdoms and regions bordering the Middle Sea. For more detailed information and to learn about the lands farther south, see the *Southlands Worldbook* and *Demon Cults & Secret Societies*.

The ancient kingdom of Nuria Natal lies to the southwest of the Dragon Empire. Here, living gods control the lands along the magical River Nuria, often meddling in the affairs of their mortal subjects. At the moment, a fragile peace exists between the Nurians and the Dragon Empire, but recent history suggests this will not last for long. Lost tombs and rich oases dot the parched lands of the Sarklan and Crescent Deserts, and caravans and sandships ply the trade routes between Nuria Natal and the free cities of Siwal, Saph-Saph, and Makuria.

To the west, the ancient and powerful Wind Lords hold dominion over the Stone Desert. The Wind Lords' influence has awakened nature spirits of wind, stone, and fire within their domain, also home to the Tamasheq tribes and the jinnborn. On the coast, minotaurs from the Seven Cities seek to reclaim their fallen cities and ancestral lands.

The children of angels hold fast to their ancient lands in Ishadia to the east of Nuria Natal in the face of the Dragon Empire's aggression. Though the
cost has been steep
the Mharoti, who a
elsewhere. Farther
trade and piracy th
cities and waters al
notorious Corsair

All life in Nuria derives from the great river, flowing with magic and life. Its reeds hide danger and its papyrus creates the long

sands of years.

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As the balance of power shifts on the northern and eastern shores of the Middle Sea, the ripple effect is felt across the water to the south.

Nurian Trade Expansion

With the Dragon Empire turning its attentions west and thus too busy to mount a fresh assault on Nuria Natal, King Thutmoses XXIII is making the most of the opportunity presented by the last few years of relative peace. Priests of Thoth-Hermes, led by the wily Bebnum the Most-Wise (LN human male cleric 11 [Thoth-Hermes]), have been dispatched far and wide on diplomatic missions to the Seven Cities, the Magdar Kingdom, Zobeck, and even Dornig. They aim to forge lucrative new trade agreements with these wealthy cities and states and generate increased wealth for the River Kingdom. King Thutmoses plans to use these funds to build up Nuria Natal's military power so there is less need to call upon the god-kings when hostilities with the Mharoti inevitably resume. So far, trade with Capleon has increased considerably, and the Nurian Galley from Triolo now sails five times per year, instead of the previous three voyages per year. Negotiations are still ongoing between Bebnum and Queen Kitane of Kyprion, who seeks Nurian protection after her island was recently invaded.

Minotaur Diaspora

The minotaurs of the south migrated here from the eastern islands of the White Sea, from Kyprion, and from settlements along the coast from Harkesh to Marea. Sailors and merchants, they traded with the Nurians and the folk of the Seven Cities and established new homes, palaces, and labyrinths in the southern cities of Roshgazi, Cindass, Kadralhu, and Derrada.

broke away from the rule of the Queen of the Minotaurs in Kyprion and declared their own realm, the Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar. The "Golden Pair" of King Kaprys and Queen Melenni readied themselves for a martial response from the eastern minotaurs, but this never materialized. Instead, the Queen in the East, as she was later styled, strove (and failed) to win them back through peaceful overtures and then became occupied by the growing threat from the dragons.

The Moon Kingdom prospered until the Mharoti Empire attacked 300 years ago, wiping out the coastal cities of Roshgazi and Cindass. Their minotaur inhabitants fled across the sea to Capleon, Triolo, and back to their homeland in Kyprion—all three city states now have large minotaur populations. Not all arrived safely, however. The famed "Lost Fleet" of Roshgazi disappeared unexpectedly in the mists before it reached Capleon, and entire minotaur clans were assumed to have perished.

Now, things have come full circle—with Kyprion under threat from the Dragon Empire, a steady stream of minotaurs is heading in the other direction to Cindass where the dynamic Emir Palana Tellisha is rebuilding the ruined city. In addition, four ships from the Lost Fleet have recently made landfall at Roshgazi, 300 years after vanishing at sea. Their crew and passengers do not appear to have aged, and they have no memory of the intervening three centuries. Among them is Senator Evadne (NG female minotaur wizard 18), a learned scholar of labyrinth magic, who may know how to repair the damaged *Heart of Roshgazi* (see page 183).

Shibai Slave Revolt

The slave trade is big business on the Corsair Coast, with slaves bought and sold in the sprawling market of Mosylon in the Sultanate of Shibai for transport to the Spice Coast or Zanskar in the far South.

Many of the pirates and freebooters operating along the Corsair Coast were once slaves themselves and hate the slave trade with a passion. No one hates it more than the Istagal Raiders, a group of ship captains who are fighting a personal war against slavery. A few weeks ago, the raiders dealt a devastating blow to the greedy slavers of Ishadia, Mhalmet, and Shibai through their bold plan to trigger a slave revolt in Mosylon's main souk.

The Istagal Raiders had already planted confederates among the crowds, bidding on the slaves, when their dwarf mages summoned a bank of sea fog to roll in from the ocean and envelop the market. Then, they released a cage-load of berserk mandrills into the crowd to cause general chaos while the raiders freed and armed the slaves. The unshackled slaves began fighting their way out of the market and into the city. Riots ensued, several of Mosylon's ostentatious towers were set on fire, and two of Shibai's beys were killed in the mayhem. In all, over 400 slaves escaped on stolen merchant vessels, thereby swelling the ranks of the raiders and making the Showka

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Nuria's southern source, lies a constellation of kingdoms of great antiquity and wealth that trade with Nuria Natal, Ishadia, and Khandiria to the east but rarely lands farther north. These are the Kingdoms of Gold and Salt: the clever bards and warriors of the Lion Kingdom of Omphaya, the Cattle Queens of Terrotu, the great scholars and serpent worshippers of Lignas, the ancestor-worshipping Morreg, the warrior castes of Narumbeki, and the hideous abominations of darkest Kush. Each is a place of power and mystery, with its own gods and monsters. Brave souls can join a camel caravan and learn what treasures and what strange monsters lie in the utmost south.

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Passage, linking the Southlands to Far Cathay, a perilous undertaking for the slave traders for months to come. A bounty of more than 2,500 gp has been offered by Shibai to anyone bringing in the head of Jakeem Spiceblood, captain of the *Baboon's Fury*, and 3,000 gp for the dwarven wind mage Hashim.

RISE OF THE DARK CULTS

For centuries, dozens of cults have existed throughout the Southlands to worship the continent's many gods, semi-divine beings, spirits, and demons. In Nuria Natal and the surrounding desert, three notorious cults are growing in power and influence.

DOOMSPEAKERS

A vile cult of antipaladins and demon worshippers, the Doomspeakers haunt the Sarklan Desert, commanding feral gnoll troops to raid caravans, attack local tribes, and spread misery, destruction, and chaos. The Doomspeakers operate from a secret base somewhere in the desert or hidden beneath one of the cities of Nuria Natal, which holds their unholy text, The Book of Nine Dooms.

EMERALD ORDER

The members of this secret society devoted to Thoth-Hermes consider themselves to be the most exalted of the god's followers, since they are the custodians of the Emerald Tablet, a collection of plates of transparent green stone inscribed with the greatest secrets of their deity. Led by Dromdal Re, high priest and master alchemist, the Emerald Order attempts to steer society based on the revelations of the Tablet, by any means necessary. Members of the Order hold positions of power throughout Nuria Natal and have insinuated themselves into the kingdom's foreign trade missions. They may seek to steal magical volumes from new lands, or to influence events far from their desert homeland.

SELKET'S STING

Worship of the dark god Selket, Goddess of Scorpions, is common among the Tamasheq nomads of the Sarklan Desert who look to her for defense against venomous creatures, sandstorms, and the pitiless sun—and to inflict those very dangers on their enemies in retribution. Selket's cult is organized into small cells of fanatics who seek to punish those camel thieves and slavers who prey on the

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Dozens of possibilities await heroic (and not-so-heroic) adventurers in the lands of the south. Your player characters may wish to join a caravan to a distant city, sail across the burning desert on board a sandship, or plunder the grave goods of a long-dead pharaoh from his trap-filled pyramid. Here are a few suggestions:

- The Sultan of Siwal latest obsession is his "Garden of Delights" filled with rare plants and trees from all over the Southlands and farther afield. After dispatching adventurers to retrieve exotic flowers from the jungles of Kush, the Sultan has set now his heart on the everlasting red strawflower, which is only found growing on the highest mesas of the Stone Desert. If the PCs are persistent, they can get past the Tamasheq tribesmen who do everything they can to keep them away, obtain a plant specimen, and perhaps accidentally visit the fabulous hidden city of Kel Azjer in the process.
- Hafmoshep the Tall, eldest son of a wealthy Nurian scholar, has been captured at sea and sold into slavery. His father wants to see his son before he dies and sends the PCs east to Shibai's slave market to find him and bring him back. When they arrive, they discover that Hafmoshep escaped in the recent slave revolt and joined the Istagal Raiders. Can they track down his pirate ship and persuade him to come home?
- The PCs hire on as caravan guards for a lengthy trip across the Sarklan Desert, shipping rare spices and exotic teas from Mhalmet to Per-Bastet via Siwal. They must defend the caravan from bandits and from the vicious gnoll raiders of the Doomspeakers, led by Gruulok, a ferocious and cannibalistic antipaladin.
- High Priestess Nafrini wants the original silver Tablets of Bastet retrieved from the ruins of Tes-Luria and brought to her great temple in Per-Bastet. The PCs are sent to recover the tablets, which describe the correct forms and rituals of the goddess's faith, from the Hundred Pillars of Bastet's Daughter. There they must persuade the fearsome banshee Maatkare Abastet, born the daughter of Bastet and a forgotten human priest, to part with them. Exploring the ruins will likely bring the adventurers into conflict with the new dark cult of Bastet that has sprung up in the city (see page 176).
- A self-styled "Ghul King" has arisen among the undead of Siwal's Grand Necropolis and is violating the laws of the cemetery that state the living reign by day and the undead by night. Gravebinders, mourners, and embalmers have been attacked by hungry ghouls in daylight, leading Golemesh Abu Karim, the Necropolis's long-standing troll gravedigger, to make a formal complaint to the sultan's vizier. Brave heroes are needed to bring this renegade ghoul leader to justice and restore the traditions of the Necropolis.

Nuria Natal

The River Kingdom is a tranquil oasis of ancient knowledge. It is a festering cesspit of corruption. It is a well-governed and harmonious land with a special place in the world—and its shadows are filled with ancient terrors.

As a land of opposites and millennial histories, Nuria Natal is difficult to pigeonhole. Its people are powerful, and its priests and wizards especially so. Despite a dozen major attempts at conquest, the people of Nuria Natal have turned back the draconic tide, in some cases with ease, in others with a narrow margin and major losses. Its defenses are robust, and the people's pride in their knowledge and achievements gives them a confidence that others mistake for arrogance.

The defenses of Nuria Natal are based on the nation's close relationship with its gods. Aten, Horus, and Bastet are not figures worshipped from afar; they walk the earth when called, and their power has thrown the Mharoti dragons back in confusion several times.

However, the gods are fickle, and on many occasions they have refused to answer the entreaties of mortals. In these cases, the people resurrected some of their ancient kings, powerful heroes whose bodies had lain under the sands and in step-pyramid tombs for ages. These restored rulers led several brilliant defenses of Nuria Natal against the dragons. Afterward, though, the reborn rulers chose to stay and reassert themselves in Nurian politics. This has been awkward, to say the least, for the current king.

Nuria Natal is the home of the Southern Tongue, which seems especially suited for use in magic. Some spells and incantations known in the south are somehow never translated into Common, Northern, or Draconic speech.

Government

The current god-king, Thutmoses XXIII, is a somewhat besieged and worried man of middle years with a prominent nose, shaved head, and a glorious beard woven with gold and mithral. Seven of his kingly ancestors have been awoken from their tombs to defend the land against the Mharoti dragon-armies, and his own power has been eroded. One of the kings returned to his tomb beneath the great step pyramid, two were slain in battle with the dragon lords, and four still wander the kingdom: Queen-Goddess Meskhenit, God-King Set-Amun, God-Wizard Kuluma-Siris, and God-King Sut-Akhaman. The most obvious sign of this erosion is the increasing independence of Per-Xor and Per-Bastet, both of which still render tribute and troops to Nuria but with increasingly loud complaints and a sense that perhaps the current god-king does not measure up to the standards of his illustrious ancestors.

Whatever the grumbling of the provinces and other major cities, though, the people of Nuria Natal are entirely united in their defiance of foreign invasion, and their loyalty to Thutmoses is great. The other god-kings and queens might also be popular, but when the time comes to fend off great dangers, the current living king still holds his people's hearts. The fact that he also controls the vast machinery of grain production, bread-making, and the loyalty of the matron-goddess Ninkash is surely also helpful to the king's peace of mind.

Ley Lines, Red Portals, and Catslide Alleys

Magic is everywhere in Nuria Natal. Powerful ley lines course through the land, allowing geomancers and wielders of hieroglyphic magic to harness and manipulate their arcane energy. Other wizards have mastered the mysterious Red Portals, using them to travel to other places, dimensions, and times while the unpredictable catslide alleys provide the means to journey swiftly from one cat-friendly city to another.

Ley Lines

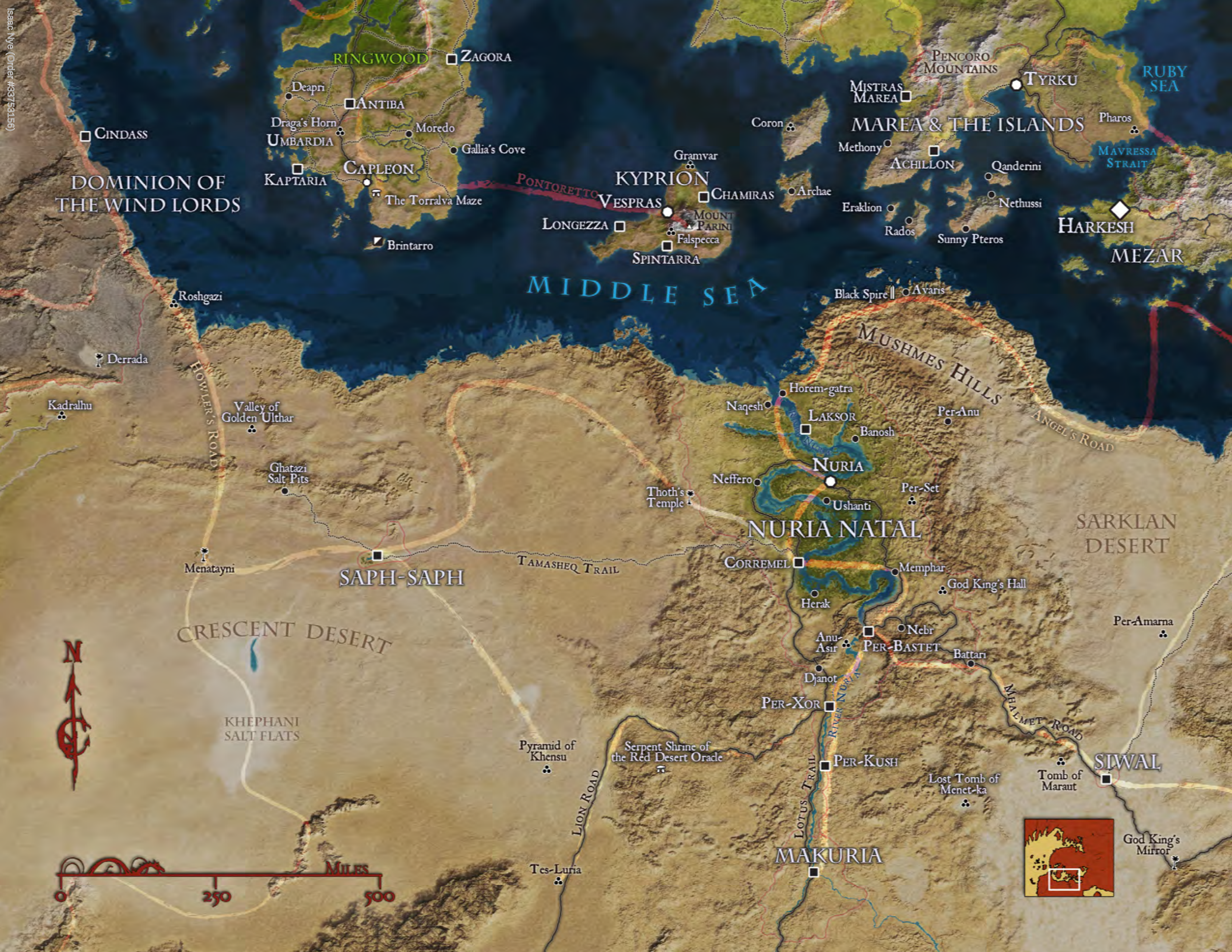
The story of Nuria Natal is inextricably bound to the mighty ley lines that run through the kingdom. Five thousand years ago, when the seven founding human families gathered on the banks of the River Nuria at the end of their long journey, the wizard Senewosret sensed the powerful arcane energy flowing through it. Realizing he could tap into the ley line that ran along the river's entire length, Senewosret ordered a new city to be built on its banks. For the next five millennia, the wizard-kings and sorcerer-queens of Nuria experimented with the ley lines and the magical waters of the river, using them to extend and prolong their lives until they unlocked a sort of semi-divinity and were able to develop rituals through which they could be awakened from the slumber of death to aid their descendants.

The titanic ley line running the length of the River Nuria is known as the Angel's Road. When it reaches the Middle Sea, it turns east to Efisis in the Dragon Empire, before heading southeast into Ishadia. Numerous strong and weak ley lines branch off it. The legendary Oasis of Figs drifts along these lines, appearing at a different location in the desert with each sunset. Ruled by Sultan Hajani the Benevolent from his colorful marble palace, time passes strangely at the oasis and visitors who eat the sultan's iridescent figs often find themselves unable to leave.

West of Nuria Natal, the Howler's Road runs from the Pyramid of Khensu through the Crescent Desert to Saph-Saph, Roshgazi, and Cindass, all the way to Bemmea in the Magocracy of Allain, while the Leviathan's Road runs south from Bemmea and passes through the Isle of Morphoi before reaching Mardas Vhula-gai in the Chelamite Mountains.

Red Portals

Centuries ago, a group of Nurian wizards determined how to open mystic portals at various points along the ley lines. Dubbing them the Red Portals, these mages set about mastering their use. Today, the Honorable Society


RINGWOOD
Zagora
Pencoro Mountains
Tyrku
Ruby Sea
Deapri
Antiba
Mistras Marea
Coron
Marea & the Islands
Pharos
Cindass
Draga's Horn
Umbardia
Moredo
Gallia's Cove
Methony
Achillon
Qanderini
Mavressa Strait
Gramvar
Kaptaria
Capleon
Kyprion
Archae
Dominion of the Wind Lords
The Torralva Maze
Pontoretto
Vespras
Chamiras
Eraklion
Nethussi
Harkesh
Mount Parini
Longezza
Falspecca
Rados
Sunny Pteros
Brintarro
Spintarra
Mezar
Middle Sea
Black Spire
Avaris
Roshgazi
Mushmes Hills
Derrada
Horem-gatra
Naqesh
Laksor
Per-Anu
Angel's Road
Kadralhu
Howler's Road
Valley of Golden Ulthar
Banosh
River Nuria
Nuria
Ghatazi Salt Pits
Neffero
Per-Set
Thoth's Temple
Ushanti
Sarklan Desert
Nuria Natal
Menatayni
Saph-Saph
Tamasheq Trail
Corremel
Memphar
God King's Hall
Herak
Per-Amarna
Crescent Desert
Anu-Asir
Per-Bastet
Nebr
Battari
Djanot
Per-Xor
Mhalmet Road
Khephani Salt Flats
Pyramid of Khensu
Serpent Shrine of the Red Desert Oracle
Per-Kush
Siwal
Lost Tomb of Menet-ka
Tomb of Maraut
Lion Road
Lotus Trail
God King's Mirror
N
Makuria
Tes-Luria
Miles
0
250
500

of Portal Wizards still exists in Per-Anu and remains devoted to studying and manipulating the portals. See Appendix for a selection of spells created by the portal wizards.

The Red Portals connect not only to the shadow roads but also other planes, dimensions, and times, allowing the GM to create side campaigns and mysterious adventure sites without having to build an entire world. The idea is, of course, to suggest whole realms of bizarre, wondrous, magical, or horrifying alternate realities. This is a touch of world-tripping, whether *Princes in Amber*-style or just plane-hopping. Make it epic by playing up the bizarre, and make it clear that it is Another Time, A Distant Place, through crazy accents, flashback music, a shift in lighting, or other cues that the game has moved into Other Realms.

Some Red Portals are anchored to an archway, door, or other opening; others are invisible or exist only as a slight shimmering in the air. To activate a portal, PCs need to visualize themselves traveling along the shadow road just before they step through it.

The Red Portals go to a hundred different destinations (if one believes the lore) or just to one (if you have a particular destination in mind). To randomly determine where a given Red Portal goes, roll on the Destinations Table below. Portals can be one-way or two-way.

Catslide Alleys

Magical portals known as catslide alleys link those cities where cats and other feline creatures are held in high regard. Per-Bastet holds a dozen or so of these alleys—mostly in the District of the Cat—but they exist throughout Midgard. Anyone following a cat into a catslide alley is likely to be transported to another cat-friendly place, perhaps the merchant-city of Triolo, an emperor's palace in Far Cathay, or a much stranger feline realms on the Plateau of Leng or among hellcats in the Eleven Hells. Like cats themselves, the alleys are unpredictable. Their workings are left to the GM's capriciousness, but they serve as an excellent means to transport unsuspecting PCs from one adventure to the next.

Nuria, City of the River

The capital is lined with monuments, domed temples, palm trees, and thousands of houses built of dried river mud. The whole place sprawls for miles along the riverbank, and when the River Nuria floods, the city's magic defends it from being entirely washed away.

Palm Palace of the God-King

The palace contains an interior of interlinked courtyards shaded by enormous palms, and its walls are covered with vast amounts of thinly beaten gold—gold cursed, warded, and protected by divine sanction. Those who steal are invariably found dead, slain by walking statues, devoured

DESTINATIONS TABLE

d20	Destination
1	The city of Nuria during the rule of Thutmoses I
2	On the Great Stair of the Golden Citadel, deep beneath Mount Rygar in the Ironcrags
3	The boisterous drinking hall of the Storm Court where the Northern gods meet
4	3,000 years ago on the island of Ankesh as it begins to sink beneath the Western Ocean
5	At the top of the Great Stross Clock Tower in the Free City of Zobeck
6	The River Court of the Arbonesse at the height of elven power
7	Midnight in the Grand Necropolis of Siwal
8	The city of Uxloon at the height of the Great Mage Wars as Pah'draguusthalai the Devourer arrives to destroy the city
9	Outside Baba Yaga's hut
10	At the Birch Queen's Fair in the Faerie Realm
11	In the seemingly abandoned halls of the Courts of the Shadow Fey
12	Among the ancient branches of Yggdrasil the World Tree
13	300 years ago as the dragons sweep in to attack the city of Roshgazi
14	The Gardens of Carnessa in their heyday
15	The Junkyard of Cogs on the Plane of Rusty Gears
16	The Great Hall of Bratis Castle as the vampires prepare to celebrate the Winter Solstice
17	Somewhere nasty in the Eleven Hells—at the junction of the Hell of Cannibals and the Hell of Blood
18	Deep in the Margreve Forest, at a yearlong gathering of treant druids
19	A hidden chamber in the Baths of Tes-Luria, when Bastet still ruled the city
20	Icy Hyperborea as a blasphemous flock of mi-go flies down to land

down to scraps by gnoll avengers, or withered into dry husks that whisper the names of the god-kings a never-ending stream of praise. Thefts are rare.

The palace interior includes courtyard gardens, terraces, storerooms, and working spaces for priests, accountants, scribes, and overseers as well as servants. All serve Thutmoses well and are prou of their station, and those who work in the palace live longer and healthier lives than those who work elsewhere, since the divine favor of Nuria's gods enriches the lives of all those near them.

The exceptions to this rule are those servants assigned to the Royal Serpent's Courtyard, where the God-King Set-Amun has installed himself as a adviser and intriguer. Said to be the son of a slain serpent-god and a queen of the early dynasties, Set-Amun seems content for now to revel in his role as counselor and defender. He also has a keen eye for military affairs, and the current king fears his winning a second great victory against the Mharoti—which would raise Set-Amun's status even further among the people.

STEP PYRAMIDS OF FAIZAL

Nine pyramids—three for great kings, three for gre queens, and three for dead demigods—stand along the river outside the city walls. These step pyramids are guarded by the priests of Anu-Akma and a coho of gnoll guardians, and those who defile them by climbing the steps without proper purification are cut down on the spot. Two tombs were robbed long ages ago, but Queen Hanutsen's has been recently resealed, and King Nebetka II's stands empty since its inhabitant was resurrected and died in battle.

TOMBS OF THE GOD-KINGS

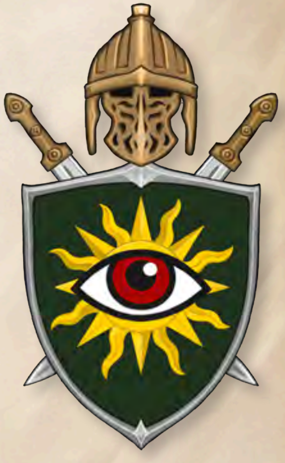
Dozens of mausoleums tended by priests and attendants stand in a secluded part of town. These tombs of the god-kings are guarded not merely by traps and hideous beasts but also by divine heralds and holy curses—and a few are even being rebuilt a throne chambers for the living gods because some o these kings now live as mummies or in restored fles The place crawls with magic, demons, and danger.

The God-Wizard Kuluma-Siris maintains a towe here, and he issues orders for strange relics, object oils, stones, and other materials to be brought to him daily. The God-King Thutmoses says that Kuluma-Siris is enchanting new weapons and arm for the defense of the kingdom, but no one knows for certain.

FOREST OF OBELISKS

This city market serves as a place of debate, commerce, quick trysts, and quicker speeches. The bazaar sells all goods and is a market for slaves, servants, and laborers of all kinds, from dwarf smiths to gnoll caravan guards. The whole market

RIVER KINGDOM OF NURIA NATAL



Symbol: A black falcon and a green cobra on a golden field OR a single eye surrounded by the sun, red, white, and gold

Ruler: King Thutmoses XXIII (LG male human cleric 12 [Aten]) and his daughter and heir, Perititi (LG female human wizard 6)

God-Kings: Reborn Queen-Goddess Meskhenit, Mother of Destiny and Defender of the Realm (NE female lich wizard 18/cleric 2 [Bastet]); God-King Set-Amun (LE male legendary human fighter 16); God-Wizard Kuluma-Siris (CE male lich wizard 16); God-King Sut-Akhaman (LN male mummy cleric 19 [Anu-Akma]); God-King Irsu Thanetsi Khamet, Eye of Anu-Akma and Warden of the Red Portal (LE male mummy wizard 20)

Important Personages: High Priestess Nafrini (CN female human); Zuberi, the Wise Keeper of Per-Xor (CE male human); Saint Hafsah, Golden Daughter of the Prophet (LG female human); High Priest of Ptah Hishtu Inneqtal (LG male dwarf); Ekibe of the Barley, Matron-Keeper of Corremel (CG female dwarf); Beloved of Horus, Ukwa Ushteq (LG male heru [ravenfolk]); Old Khenses, Wandering Preacher (LG male human); Grandmaster of the Talons of Heru, the Wingless One (LE male heru [ravenfolk]); Ashabtilach, Shellwright of Modest Virtue and Maker of Retrievers (LE male dwarf)

Population: 13,070,000 (12,000,000 humans, 500,000 gnolls, 350,000 dwarves, 130,000 heru [ravenfolk], 90,000 minotaurs, 22,000 gearforged)

Capital: Nuria, population 211,000 (150,000 humans, 25,000 dwarves, 18,000 gearforged, 17,000 gnolls, 1,000 heru)

Cities: Corremel, population 90,000; Per-Kush, population 65,000; Per-Bastet, population 50,000; Per-Xor, population 39,000; Laksor, population 23,000

Towns: Avaris, Banosh, Battari, Djanot, Herak, Horem-gatra, Memphar, Naqesh, Nebr, Neffero, Per-Anu, Ushanti, populations all under 5,000

Great Gods: Anu-Akma, Aten, Bastet, Horus, Ninkash, Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: Linen, wheat, barley, hemp, jewels, perfumes, papyrus, cattle, magic scrolls is well organized by the priests of Horus, who assign each vendor a place for a small fee. The largest single stall is the Market-Church of Ninkash, whose priestesses bring barrels of holy ale and conduct services in the market daily.

Barge Souk of Nuria

Much of the city's trade arrives by river, and trade happens directly on the boats. The barge souk buys and sells in bulk: gallons of honey, oil, and beer, huge amphorae of wine, and enormous sacks of every grain and bean, as well as monumental stone blocks and even bone and ivory.

Corremel, the City of Ale

As the breadbasket of Nuria Natal, Corremel is a grain-producing wonder located in the river delta, and it commands a skilled fishing fleet as well. Founded by minotaurs and ruled by Priestess Ekibe of the Barley, the city is devoted to agriculture and brewing. The beer of Corremel slakes the thirsts of every Nurian in the delta, from peasant to king. The city is wealthy but not ostentatious, and it is one of the few that doesn't host a reborn god-king. Its Temple of Ninkash Reaping shines almost impossibly bright in daylight; the roof and the exterior walls of its bell towers are enchanted with a golden light that dies at sunset each day.

Per-Anu, City of Crimson Pillars

Well-hidden amid the desert dunes, Per-Anu is devoted to death, the underworld, and the life beyond, and it is the final resting place of many of Nuria Natal's greatest warriors and sorcerers. The City of Crimson Pillars does not encourage casual visitors. Instead it welcomes only those who guide others into the afterlife, including the faithful of Anu-Akma, priestesses of Bastet, undead, and gnolls, as well as warriors, assassins, and wizards with a reputation for bloody violence.

The city is ruled by the God-King Irsu Thanetsi Khamet, Eye of Anu-Akma and Warden of the Red Portal. Once a relatively minor king of the 16th dynasty, Irsu rose as undead some time after his death and became ruler of Per-Bastet for many years. Initiated into the mysteries of Anu-Akma by a rogue priestess of Bastet, he devoted himself to the study of the Red Portals (see page 170) and became king of Per-Anu, ruling the city from his undead-filled Many Pillared Palace. Three great portals to the Underworld exist in the city, rich in magical energies. Competing wizards, demons, and devils are drawn to them, and sorcery performed near these gates often has unintended consequences.

Per-Bastet, the City of Cats

The Goddess of Cats made this city her home, and she walks here now with her gnoll admirers. The entire city is a vast home for tens of thousands of cats and gnolls, and humans claim they are increasingly unwelcome. The city's ruler is the great-grandmother of the current King Thutmoses, who styles herself the Reborn Queen-Goddess Meskhenit, Mother of Destiny and Defender of the Realm. She turned back the tide of a Mharoti army near the ruins of Iram, City of Pillars, and since that time her hold on the region near Per-Bastet has been unshakable. Meskhenit retains a harem of 15 young weretigers, who are said to have been gifts from a wealthy Khandiri prince.

The City of Per-Bastet is home to a vast array of caravans and three great temples: to Anu-Akma, to Horus, and the greatest of all to Bastet. The high priestess within the Dome of the Divine Face of Bastet is Nafrini, a black-skinned woman of surpassing beauty and gentleness. Her word commands the city's armies of gnolls, and she and Meskhenit enjoy a small rivalry, expressed in feats of perfumery and the employment of magic against Nuria Natal's enemies.

River of Sand

A moving "river" of sand flows into Per-Bastet from the Sarklan Desert at a speed of 15 miles per hour, coursing through the city's core beneath numerous aging bridges, before pouring into a vast, funnel-shaped crater known as the Pit where it vanishes. Objects carried into the Pit are sometimes found years, decades, or even centuries later, often hundreds of miles away in random locations in the desert. The river is home to earth elementals and emits a strong aura of elemental magic.

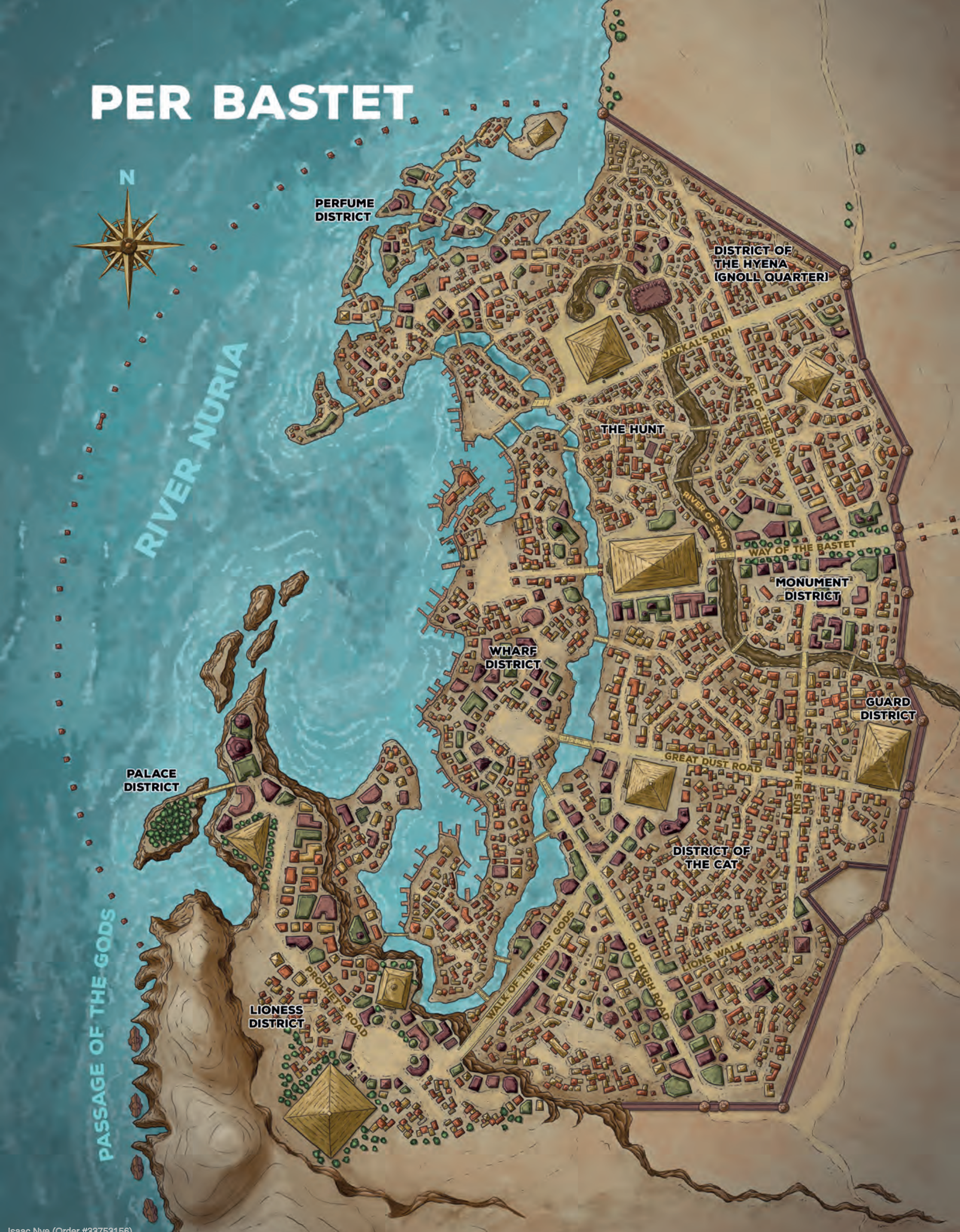
Per-Kush, City of Ivory

In the south, the oliphants, camelpards, hunting birds, and much stranger creatures yet are brought through Per-Kush, the City of Ivory. Its patron is the Hunter, and its dark-skinned people are wise in the ways of wild creatures. Their camel caravans travel daily to the Kingdoms of Gold and Salt, and their river boats bring Nurian grain to the larger cities upriver. Per-Kush is not as large as Nuria, but it is swiftly growing rich and strong. Its elephant-god Abu is also gaining in adherents, as a water god and god of strength and wealth.

The dwarves of Per-Kush are peculiar, followers of southern demons and their patron Ptah (Volund). One of these dwarves, Ashabtilach, calls himself a shellwright (a maker of automaton shells). He builds constructs of enormous ambition, some of brass and iron, others including darker elements as demonic retrievers. So far, these automatons serve the kingdom.

Per-Xor, the City of the Sun

Built within the last two centuries —recently by Nurian standards—Per-Xor is a city of faith and for the faithful, the home and center of the worship of Aten, the Sun God. It was greatly scarred 40 years ago when Aten's Prophet was martyred in the city's central square. The Prophet's Square is surrounded by four great Towers to the Sun, each with balconies for preachers and a sun-focusing glass at its peak. The square is the site of enormous public acts of devotion, from the humble Blessing of the Children in the late spring to the raucous Barley Harvest festival in the


PER BASTET
N
PERFUME DISTRICT
DISTRICT OF THE HYENA (GNOLL QUARTER)
JACKAL'S RUN
ARC OF THE SUN
THE HUNT
RIVER NURIA
RIVER OF SAND
WAY OF THE BASTET
MONUMENT DISTRICT
WHARF DISTRICT
GUARD DISTRICT
GREAT DUST ROAD
ARC OF THE SUN
PALACE DISTRICT
DISTRICT OF THE CAT
PASSAGE OF THE GODS
WALK OF THE FIRST GODS
OLD KUSH ROAD
LIONS WALK
PROPHET'S ROAD
LIONESS DISTRICT

later summer and the Height of Aten frenzy of prayer and scourging of unbelievers in midsummer.

At the height of the rainy season, the Xorians build an enormous bonfire of palm wood, myrrh, and oils outside the Tomb of the Prophet, the holiest shrine of the city. Its fiery immolation is said to light the way for Aten's return and triumph each year. The Tomb's construction was begun 40 years ago and is not entirely completed; it is an elaborate structure of carved and enchanted marble and red granite.

The rulers of Per-Xor are the high priest and high priestess of Aten. They strive to keep the splinter cult of the Prophet from gaining equal status to Aten himself, but it is like interfering in a struggle between brothers. Zuberi, the Wise Keeper of Per-Xor, and Saint Hafsah, Golden Daughter of the Prophet, are a pair of grandparents with an enormous family of children, grandchildren, and relatives on every side. The high priest Zuberi maintains three lesser wives, each also a powerful woman commanding (respectively) the human, dwarf, and gnoll folk of Per-Xor. All the Ateni clan swear allegiance to King Thutmoses and the great Palm Palace of Nuria, but their first loyalty is clearly to their faith and missionary work. The followers of the Prophet Ra-Amon-Ra are less loyal to the king Thutmoses, and its most radical preachers speak of a rebellion and a new, holy dynasty.

Famous Tombs and Ruins

The deserts of Nuria Natal are renowned for the dozens of tombs, pyramids, and ruins lying half-buried amid the sands. Here are some legendary places worthy of exploration by the fearless and the foolhardy.

Corrupted Pyramid of Khensu: Khensu was vizier to the god-kings during the chaotic 9th Dynasty and made pacts with three scheming devils of passion, hubris, and ambition in an attempt to become a godling himself. Khensu stole laborers who were supposed to be building his master's mausoleum and took them into the desert to perform the *Blood Ritual of Invoked Divinity*. Things went disastrously wrong and this haunted pyramid filled with wights, mummies, and ghosts was the result.

Field of the Lost Army: Long ago, the desert swallowed up the remnants of a foolish Mharoti army. Occasionally, hungry shades emerge from the sands near the ruins of Iram, City of Pillars. These are the undead spirits of the hapless soldiers of the Dragon Empire, doomed to follow their general's last commands until a new master learns how to control them. The shades remember past visitors and previous encounters, but they cannot leave this field of bones.

Growling Sanctuary: Located below the surface of the River of Sand in the city of Per-Bastet, the Growling Sanctuary is a long-forgotten catfolk tomb, so-named because of the strange sounds that reverberate through it as the River of Sand scrapes past. Inside the sanctuary, catfolk mummies and other foul creatures guard sacred treasures of the cat god's wicked aspect.

Lost Tomb of Menet-Ka: Menet-Ka was a minor king in ancient Nuria Natal who was buried beneath an oasis fed by an underground branch of the River Nuria and close to a powerful ley line. The plan was that the blessed waters of the river would flow into the dead king after entombment, and he would return to life gifted with staggering power. Unfortunately, Menet-Ka's corruption meant he returned as an undead creature, and his tomb now serves as a death trap, designed to steal the breath from any who dare to disturb his final resting place.

Per-Amarna, City of Scorpions: Out in the dunes of the Sarklan Desert lie the ruins of a once-great city, Per-Amarna, still the seat of Selket's power. Here, Selket's high priestess Dakhamunza, Daughter of Selket, resides with her attendants and loyal followers within the still-intact temple of the dark god. A great hidden aquifer beneath the city provides life-giving water to those that live there. Home to a gypsosphinx, the temple contains myriad mummies to defend against unwanted intruders. Any who find their way in are met by the wrathful high priestess, who summons her many faithful and venomous pets to deal with infidels daring to defile her goddess's holy place.

Per-Maraut, Lost Nurian Necropolis: This city of narrow, steeply sloped pyramids of glossy black stone once belonged to the Nurian nobles who went on to found Siwal and Saph-Saph. Much later, a legion of Mharoti warriors' clumsy attempts to plunder the graveyard unleashed terrible curses and fearsome tomb guardians. Today, the site is a haven for demons, constructs, and the restless dead.

Per-Set: Once a thriving city, Per-Set is now little more than a caravan stop, but it is notable for being home to the dark god Set's greatest temple, the Supreme Temple of the Lord of the Red Lands.

Tes-Luria: This was once the seat of the Carnidine Kingdom, founded and ruled by Bastet for centuries before she departed for Per-Bastet. The former capital was the greatest metropolis in the Southlands, a hub of trade, scholarship, and rich harvests. It fell into ruins hundreds of years ago and is rarely visited. Many of the richest godlings of Nuria Natal are buried in the tombs of Tes-Luria, protected by mummified sphinxes, stone golems, and undead gnoll warriors. In recent months, a new cult of catfolk and gnolls who worship Bastet's darker aspects of ferocity and lust has sprung up in Tes-Luria. This sect calls itself the Sisterhood of the Feral Scratch and is rededicating the ruined Grand Fane as her temple.

Tomb of Tiberesh: Not far from Per-Bastet lies the recently uncovered ruined city of Anu-Asir, once ruled by the blasphemous sorcerer-king Tiberesh. Like other pharaohs, he planned to ascend to godhood after his death. Speculators calling themselves Golden Falcon Antiquities [redacted] willing to plunder Tiberesh's trap-filled pyramid.

FREE CITIES OF THE DESERT

The three city-states of Siwal, Saph-Saph, and Makuria were founded by independent-minded Nurians to expand the River Kingdom's influence beyond its borders and serve as buffers to its frontiers. These beautiful city-states have flourished—their merchants ply the trade routes through the treacherous dunes in their sandships and on their camels, and control the flow of goods from distant lands. The benefits of the Free Cities' independence far outweighs any limited tribute Nuria Natal might extract from vassal states, and so, they remain honorable and friendly trade partners with the River Kingdom, prospering in Nuria Natal's shadow.

SIWAL, CITY OF GARDENS

Siwal is the largest settlement of the Sarklan Desert, and it is a center of culture and commerce. Minarets of basalt tower over fountains of granite and marble statuary. Built around a natural oasis and watered with elemental magic, the city's gardens line all structures in Siwal, including its high outer walls. Great, rakishly cut sandships glide silently into the city through tall, intricate gates shaped like enormous cathedral windows. Within, the ships dock at the Iron Spine, a set of thorny wharfs that fill a vast stone-paved dock plaza. In times of plenty, the Spine docks are loud and bustling; in times of piracy and want, they rattle nearly empty, filled with swirling dust devils.

Traditional camel caravans arrive through the narrow Camel Gate carrying salt, spices, barley, and other goods from Nuria Natal and the cities of the Corsair Coast. The most famous lodging for the caravaneers is the House of Mehmet, a caravanserai known for the quality of its food, its dislike for preachiness, and the strong arms of its guard.

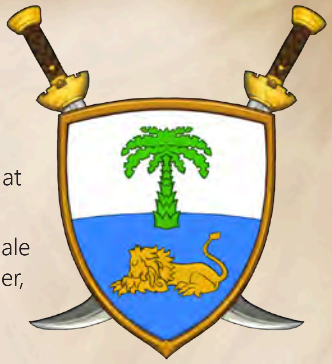
Siwal is also a city famous for dance, as others are for weaving carpets or creating beautiful books or strong steel and armor. The Zahrah al-Zaina are among the best dancers in the city, though hardly the only ones. Even the sultan's harem includes a dance troupe. Less reputable independents ply their trade in the caravanserai and in shops near the Iron Spine, where the sandships dock.

PEOPLE OF THE CITY

Despite its lush opulence, Siwal's inhabitants guard their treasures behind high walls and heavy gates. Urchins as well as storytellers fill the streets, and the Grand Souk reflects the ebb and flow of trade each season. Temple bells ring throughout the day, and the wailing of mourners can be heard from the enormous necropolis north of the city.

The Defender of the Faithful, the Sultan al-Mamun, rules Siwal with his vizier, Akil ibn Khaldun. A hundred difficulties beset the two, from assassins to sand pirates, and from the intrigues of djinn to the dangers of forbidden romance. Fortunately, the city is filled with the brave

FREE CITY OF SIWAL



Symbol: A palm tree and a sleeping lion on a field white at top, blue on the bottom

Ruler: Sultan al-Mamun (LN male human rogue 15) with his vizier, Akil ibn Khaldun (LN male human fighter 10)

Important Personages: Salt Merchant Meshna Elai (LN male human); Master Gardener Muadil abd-Muadil (CG male human); Mehmet the Caravan Master (LN male human); Master Gravebinder Panshal al-Marhji (LN male human); Ikhnaton of Siwal, Wandering Preacher (LG male human)

Population: 9,500 (8,000 humans, 700 gnolls, 500 dwarves, 300 heru [ravenfolk])

Great Gods: Aten, Nun and Naunet (Yarila and Porevit as water and chaos gods), Ptah, Sothis-Shai (Rava), Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: Dates, millet, barley, sandship transport, rare flowers, herbs, salt, mummy dust, opals

[redacted]

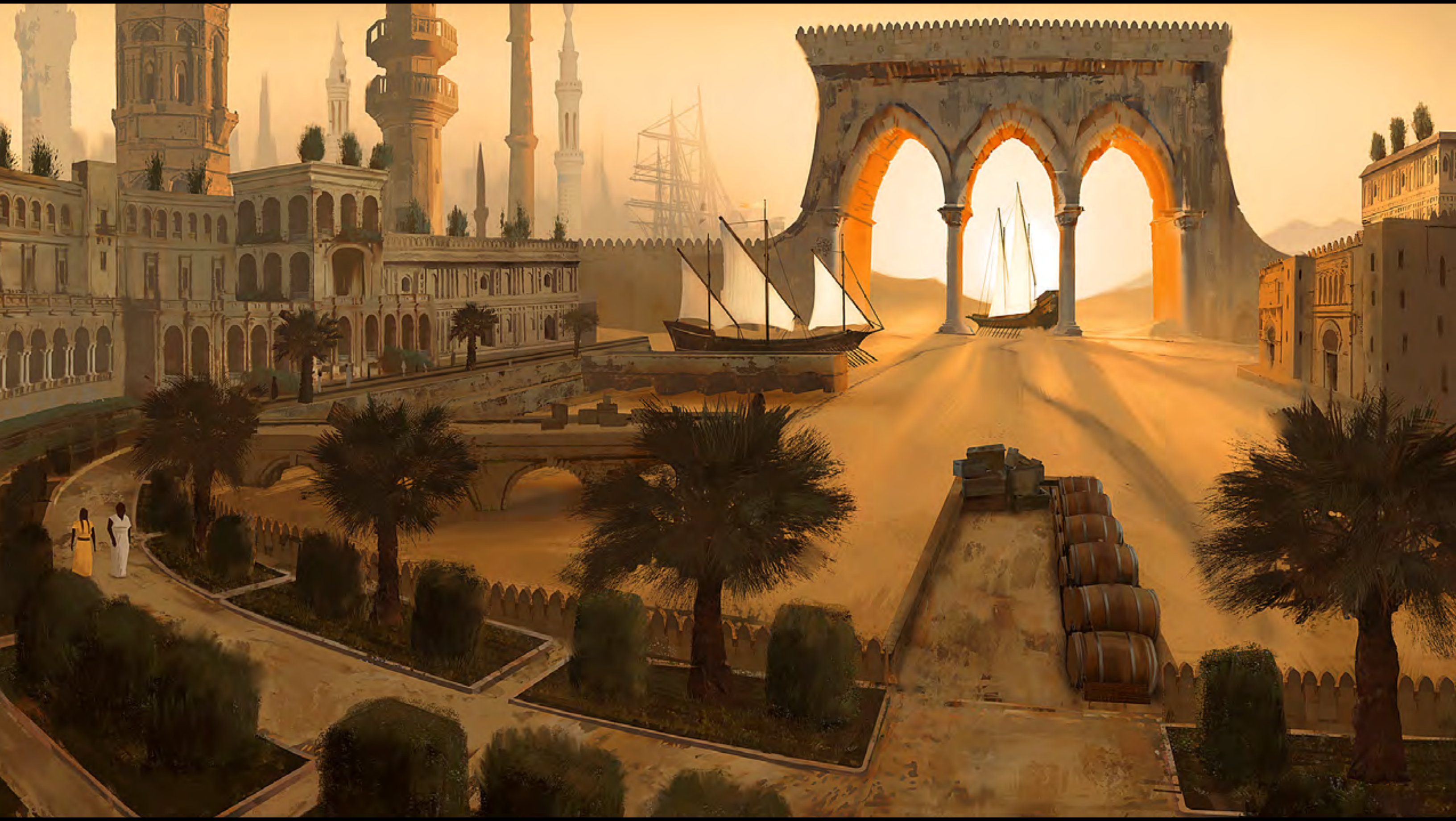
vast emptiness of the desert. Some consist of cool pools surrounded by thick stands of date palms or are hidden in shaded ravines carved by flash floods. Others dry out in the hottest parts of summer, only reappearing with a winter rain, or requiring travelers to dig them out after the sand and wind turn them into muddy pits.

Crescent Desert: Derrada, Menatayni, Qitta (on the Lion Road), Thoth's Temple (school of magic)

Sarklan Desert: Faheleel, God King's Mirror (on the Mhalmet Road)

Stone Desert: Al Naheel, Jeshima, Zin-sha, Ziss

[redacted]



and the beautiful, and it is famous for its dancers and its dervishes. Siwal need never beg for charity as long as its people are courageous.

Gate of Old Cyreen

The old families of Siwal and their traditions do not change much. Old Cyreen is a city center that used to be the main city gate, before the days of the sandships. People went to meet and discuss politics and commerce at the Old Gate, and hold the yearly festivals of lanterns, of harvest, and of the dead. They still do.

The gate is very large and broad, with a domed covering. The gate was not meant to provide extensive defense, built in the days before banditry became so entrenched. On the "inside" of the Old Gate is an open yard where people make their ablutions and rest before branching out into the city. This is where the House of Mehmet stands, as well as an open-air market with shrines and counting houses.

Sandships of Siwal

The small city of Siwal claims its own Sultanate because of its sandships, sailing vessels that glide above the desert and can carry small cargos long distances. They connect Saph-Saph, Nuria, Per-Xor, Per-Bastet, and even distant Cindass, Sarkland, and the Southern Kingdoms. The city has only a handful of ships, but they and its water priests keep it from falling into the hands of the Dragon Empire or the River Kingdom. Siwal is more valuable as a neutral party than as a tiny vassal.

Salt Merchant Meshna Elai

If the party needs a patron to come to Siwal, they might hear from Meshna Elai, the salt merchant. Salt is extremely important to water retention and is a crucial commodity in any desert. The incredibly rich Meshna has a palatial estate a short walk from the sultan's palace. Adventurers in Siwal might come into town after being hired by one of his overseers or factors, as guards for one of his salt caravans, or as advisers on some difficulty.

Ancient and Respected Gardeners

The gardeners of Siwal are priests of the water gods Nun and Naunet (masks of the twin gods Yarila and Porevit), revered as teachers and as bringers of life. They oversee not only the strength of the date palms and the yield of the millet and lentil harvests but also the birth and adulthood

[redacted]

would be a much smaller place, dependent on imported foodstuffs. Many of these positions are hereditary. The eldest, the Master Gardener Muadil abd-Muadil, is a valued adviser to the sultan and frequently seen in the palace, advising him on exotic new plants to be added to his Garden of Delights.

GRAND NECROPOLIS OF SIWAL

Ten thousand heroes lie buried in the Necropolis of Siwal. Surrounding them are many more graves belonging to commoners, merchants, artisans, and poets. Scattered throughout are the graves of the restless dead, the burrows of ghouls, the dank caves of vampires, and the empty spaces beloved by ghosts. By day the Grand Necropolis is the scene of burials and remembrance of the dead. By night, it is a city unto itself.

The gravebinders are the mortuary assistants and funeral advisers for burials in the Necropolis, led by the humble Panshal al-Marhji and his daughter Aiysha. There is no death god priesthood in Siwal, that deity being associated with the taint of ghouls. Instead, the gravebinders oversee the making of shrouds, the mourning ceremonies, and the consecration of graves to prevent the rise of undead and to ward off ghouls that seek to despoil burial plots.

Gravebinders are respected but feared. The four families who dominate the trade pass on their secrets from generation to generation. In recent times, they have employed a desert troll named Golemesh Abu Karim to dig the graves and to watch over the Necropolis by night.

charms and incantations. This is true for the burials of nobles, scholars, heroes, and wealthy merchants; for poor artisans, farmers, and priests, the magic might be somewhat less efficacious.

The gravebinders are bound by the law of the Necropolis: under the sun, the living reign and may make what arrangements they will. After nightfall, though, the

[redacted]

each sandship is equipped with skate-like pontoons that allow it to sail across the sand and silt as easily as over water. Due to the differences in handling, those proficient with a water-sailing vessel may apply only half of their proficiency bonus to checks made to control a sandship. These vessels come in a wide variety of sizes and shapes. To determine the cost of the vessel, find an equivalent waterborne vehicle and add +25% of the base cost. Speed remains unchanged.

The cheapest sandship is a sandskiff used by marauders in the dunes. It is the size of a rowboat and can travel about 2 mph depending on the wind. It requires one person proficient with sailing the vessel to pilot it and has room for two more passengers or an equivalent amount of goods. **Cost**: 75 gp.

[redacted]

DESERT SITES

Scattered throughout the Southlands, these sites reward or punish travelers for straying off the beaten paths.

BLACK SPIRE: This 5-mile high pillar of obsidian overlooking the Middle Sea was created by God-King Aten-Akman when he defeated the dragons and armies of the Mharoti Empire that laid waste to the city of Avaris.

GHATAZI SALT PITS: This forlorn shanty-village in the Crescent Desert is home to a cabal of silver-tongued devils who work its slave inhabitants into the ground, mining for valuable salt. The most stained souls of those who die here are whisked away to be sold in hellish souks.

GOD-KING'S HALL: East of Memphar lies the ruined palace of the ancient God-King Sanhemkhet I, who moved the capital of Nuria to this location for the duration of his brief reign.

HARIEK HILLS: This range of low, rugged hills lies in the Sarklan Desert to the northeast of Siwal and holds many narrow canyons and gullies—ideal hiding places for

[redacted]

KHEPHANI SALT FLATS: Rich in highly prized salt, the Khephani Salt Flats of the Crescent Desert include a remote outpost on the edge of a salty lake filled with strange crustaceans. Here, the Tamasheq nomad lords force their enslaved captives to remove large bricks of translucent salt from the shores and nearby pits.

SERPENT SHRINE OF THE RED DESERT ORACLE: This shrine off the Lion Road is a place of pilgrimage for followers of Set, renowned for great prophecies and oracular pronouncements.

TOMB OF MARAUT: This trap-filled temple-tomb west of Siwal supposedly holds Maraut, the Elephant God, imprisoned by the dark sorcery and evil power of Aposis, demon-god of chaos and destruction.

spirits, ghouls and vampires hold their own court, and th
living who dare enter are fair prey for those who stalk the
shadows. Siwalians avoid entering the Necropolis after
dark by longstanding tradition.

SAPH-SAPH, SHINING JEWEL OF THE SUN

Saph-Saph is situated on the Tamasheq Trail in the
Crescent Desert, and the city occupies a long, deep,
natural depression filled with many springs and date
groves. Several communities thrive within the enormous
oasis, but the greatest is the city-fortress of Per-Saph,
home of the white marbled temple school of Aten, which
instructs new generations of his priests and paladins. Th
homes of Per-Saph form its walls, and they stand nearly
six stories high in some places. Second in grandeur and
prestige is Saph-Ket, where the Oracle of the Sun has
foretold the destinies of Nurian lords for a thousand yea
Its observatory is serviced by some of the greatest lens
grinders and glassblowers in the Southlands. The grove-
master of Saph-Ket tends the stands of cedar, and his
certain stewardship ensures sufficient growth to build o
new sandship each year.

MAKURIA

SYMBOL: Black falcon with spread wings and marked with the Eye of Horus on its breast, on a gold field

RULER: Queen Baktweret sint Taweretsa (N female human rogue 14)

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: High Priestess Halima Soltawaresi (LN female human); Howker Paarwoo, Leader of the Order of Horus (LN male heru [ravenfolk]); Anis Otkofer, Leader of the School of Thoth-Hermes (LE female human)

POPULATION: 40,000 (32,000 humans, 5,000 gnolls, 2,000 heru [ravenfolk], 1,000 dwarves)

GREAT GODS: Horus (patron), Bastet, Ninkash, Taweret (Nethus), Thoth-Hermes

TRADE GOODS: Dates, kava beans, papyrus, copper, quills, turquoise, palm oil, bananas

SAPH-SAPH

SYMBOL: Green sun above two red scimitars on a gold field

RULER: Sultan Benerib, the Most Generous Patron of the First Temple (NG male human wizard 15)

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: Agleed, most capable and wise shipmaster (NG male heru [ravenfolk]); Akhraten, Lord Commander of the First Temple of Aten (LG male human); Hemada, Keeper of the Fortress Embers (LN female human); Remitaug, Steward of the Spring of the Sun (N male dwarf); Wewanjet, Captain of the Trade Gates (NE female human)

POPULATION: 15,000 (14,000 humans, 500 gnolls, 300 dwarves, 200 heru [ravenfolk])

GREAT GODS: Aten, Nun and Naunet (Yarila and Porevit as water and chaos gods), Ptah, Sothis-Shai (Rava), Thoth-Hermes

TRADE GOODS: Dates, millet, barley, sandship transport, glass, herbs, papyrus, salt

AKURIA, CITADEL OF WINGED TRUTH

kuria lies south of Nuria on the Lotus Trail. Far less
ised on trade, its strength is in providing guards for
cenaries and caravans, and in playing Nurian and
hite border princes against each other. Further, the
lth of geese and wading birds that visit Makuria each
on migrations provides food and valuable quills for
ian scribes.

he Makurian queen Baktweret is canny and adroit at
ming. Though she knows Nuria Natal uses her as a
n against Kushite bandits and gnoll raiders, she is
e than happy to deploy her nation's better-hidden
ts when needed. In Makuria, the Order of Horus
nmands a powerful set of cavalry and heru warriors.
so employs a sharp-eyed set of scouts, saboteurs, and
ole-rousers willing to exploit the will of Horus to keep
e routes open.

OLDEN ULTHAR

p in the Crescent Desert, northwest of Saph-Saph,
choking sands give way to a hidden, ancient miracle:
Valley of Golden Ulthar. In the distant past, the whole
scent was once a green and fertile area. Over time,
vever, desertification began to gradually overtake the

ecosystem everywhere—except for this hidden valley, which for an entire age was home to a magnificent civilization known as Ulthar.

Today, Ulthar's influence on the valley persists in strange and powerful ways. At the center of the valley's long, verdant scar is a ruined temple complex that served as the capital of old Ulthar. Called Serbata, the complex sports crumbling stone walls around a looming step pyramid. The temple's outbuildings have long since fallen to dust; thieves have ransacked them, and the entire complex blooms with wild plant overgrowth. Within the temple lives Sepenret, the last priestess of Ulthar, a unique sphinx.

Sepenret is a desolate soul who spends most of her time inside the pyramid in a vast, columned hall filled with stonework that still holds part of the eldritch power of lost Ulthar. Once in a while, despite having no living lover, the lonely priestess lays an egg made of solid stone that also bears the kingdom's magic. Sepenret is served by the Wardens of the Sphinx, who safeguard the priestess and her temple from the rival tribes of lycanthropes who inhabit the valley, and also seek to recover any stolen eggs or other lost "pieces of Ulthar" in the wider world.

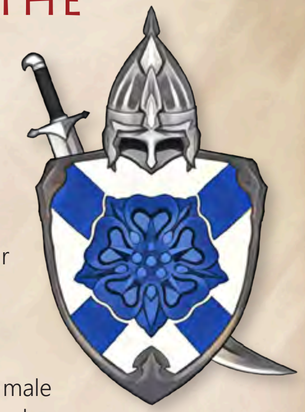
DOMINION OF THE WIND LORDS

To the west of the Crescent Desert lie the harsh and foreboding lands of the Dominion of the Wind Lords. Here, the great Stone Desert stretches to the sea in sun-baked plains of red and black rock. This is a bleakly beautiful landscape devoid of the crescent-shaped sand dunes found elsewhere in the Southlands. The seemingly barren Stone Desert hides bubbling springs, seasonal waterholes, and a scattering of precious oases.

Ruled by the Wind Lords and home to living nature spirits, the enigmatic jinnborn, and the Tamasheq, the Dominion's days of greatness are long gone. Once, the region boasted the Moon Kingdom of the minotaurs, a shining jewel of arts and learning, and the magnificent civilization of Golden Ulthar. Today the Dominion is filled with the ruins of past glories and inhabited by dangerous gnolls, treacherous elemental spirits, and secretive Tamasheq nomads as mercurial as they are haughty.

Within the Dominion, most elements of nature have an animating spirit bound to them, aware and conscious, each with its own personality and character. For the past 800 years, these spirits have fought a cruel civil war between forces loyal to the Wind Lords and those beholden to Boreas, the North Wind. The struggle's long timeline does not make it any less dangerous for mortals who end up caught in the middle. Spirits angry with one side or the other often lash out at passing caravans, and sometimes entire tribes vanish beneath battling earth elementals. Life in the Stone Desert is never easy, and the wise take pains not to end up caught in the spirits' epic struggle.

DOMINION OF THE WIND LORDS



Symbol: Blue X with a blue flower in the center on a silver field

Rulers: Wind Lord Khamsin (N primordial), Wind Lord Chergui (LN primordial), Wind Lord Shamal (CN primordial), with their avatar, the Spider Prophet (CN male human cleric 16 [Kwansi])

Important Personages: Hurat of Kel Azjer, Balla ag-Intamalou (LN male human); Commander of the Imajaghan Iskaw ag-Alkher (LG female human); Master Vrilsmith Yeddes Mocta (NG male human)

Population: 885,000 (800,000 humans, 20,000 gnolls, 20,000 jinnborn, 20,000 minotaurs, 10,000 elemental spirits, 15,000 dwarves)

Capital: Kel Azjer, population 67,000 (47,000 humans, 10,000 jinnborn, 5,000 dwarves, 5,000 elemental spirits)

City: Inkabut, the Shrine of the Spider Prophet, population 35,000; Cindass, population 15,000

Great Gods: Kwansi (Rava), Boreas, Dyjj (Veles), Eshu

Trade Goods (internal or smuggling only): salt, carpets, herbs, metal ores, gemstones, dates, vril-stones

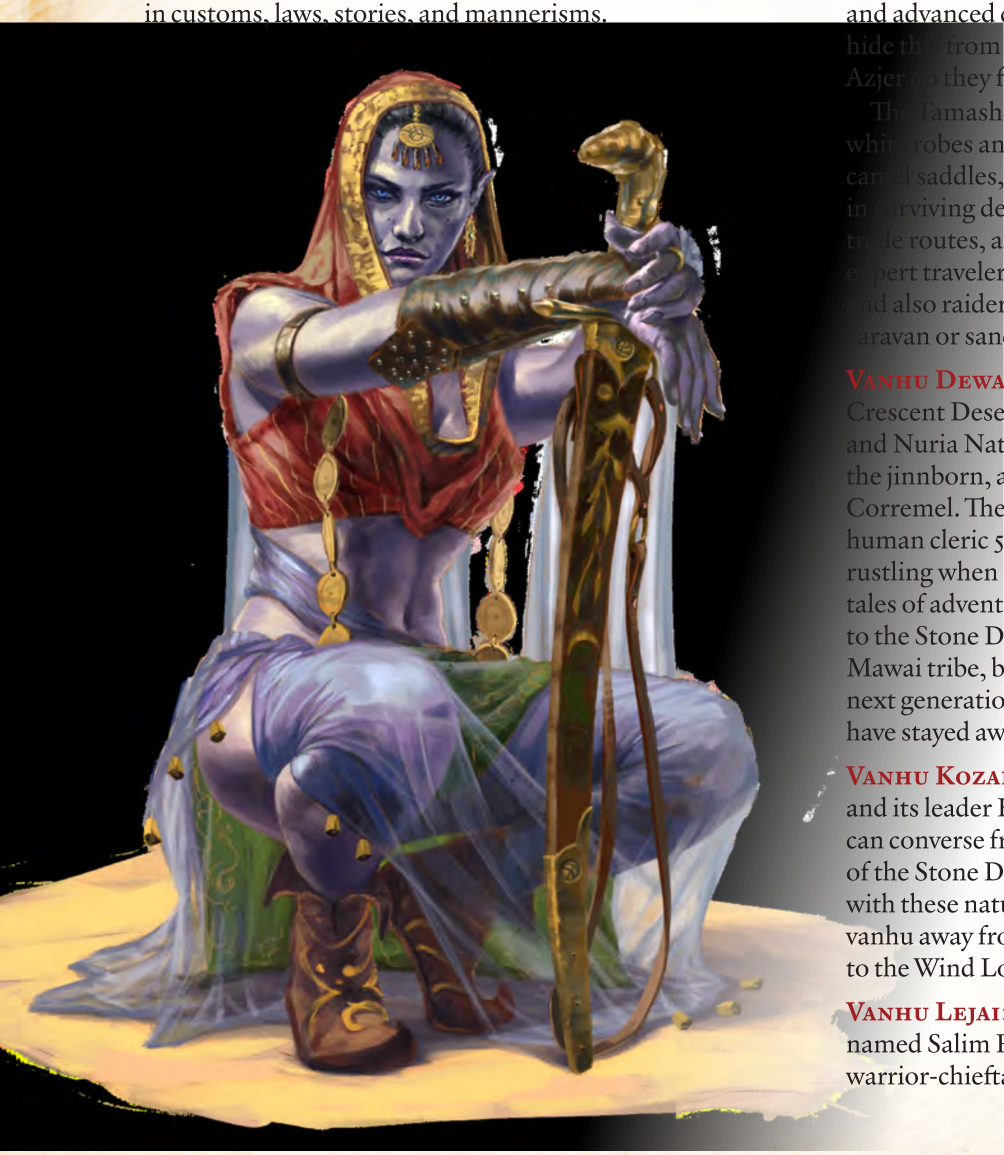
THE WIND LORDS

The Wind Lords are ancient and powerful entities from the earliest ages of the world, created from the breath of the giant Aurgelmir. While they have almost no interest in the lands outside their borders, they take an active and personal role in the Dominion's internal affairs. Chergui the East Wind is the most benevolent to mortals, embodying the cleansing winds that blow from the sea to soothe the Stone Desert's heat and acting as a calming influence on his peers. Conversely, Shamal the West hates mortals and wants to drive them from the spirits' lands. The West Wind is an enveloping gale of rocks and grit that scours flesh from bone and wears mountains into dust. Khamsin the South Wind embodies the hot winds that blow from the southern wastes. A being of extremes, both in temperature and temperament, Khamsin's opinions float between those of his fellow lords.

Opposing these three is Boreas, the North Wind who has been reborn as a true god. He maintains a separate realm far to the north, but he often visits the Dominion to stir up trouble. Serving him are the spirits he has gathered as allies and three major Tamasheq tribes.

JINNBORN

Scattered throughout the Dominion of the Wind Lords—and, to a lesser extent, the Crescent Desert—are insular tribes of jinnborn. Native people from the deepest deserts, the jinnborn claim they were the first mortals to walk the world. They say that, in the beginning, all the world was a vast desert beneath a fiery sun; in those times, the jinnborn wandered where they willed and ruled over all they saw. They refer to themselves as the *sab siraat*, or "people of the path." Descended from powerful elemental creatures called jinn, the jinnborn manifest gifts through their lineage that help them survive their harsh home environment. Air *sab siraat* are proud and aloof. Fire-based *sab siraat* are vicious and draconian. Water *sab siraat* are carefree but mercurial, and earth *sab siraat* are stoic and driven. Even with these tendencies, though, jinnborn tribes exhibit great diversity in customs, laws, stories, and mannerisms.



Passionate people, the jinnborn seek wealth when they can, revel in revenge when they must, and cherish close companionship always. Outsiders label them as capricious or even savage, never fully aware of the veil that hides the jinnborn's true nature. For more information on jinnborn characters, see the *Southlands Worldbook* and *Unlikely Heroes*.

TAMASHEQ, PEOPLE OF THE DESERT

Virtually unknown outside the desert, half a million Tamasheq inhabit the Southlands. Most live in the Stone Desert, but they are also widespread throughout the Crescent and Sarklan Deserts surrounding Nuria Natal. They speak their own hidden tongue, called Tamasheq, as well as the Southern Tongue and not infrequently Gnoll, Draconic, and Kushite. Organized into *vanhu*, or tribes of several families each, their lives are spent on the move from oasis to oasis, keeping herds of goats and camels and conducting trade with the Kingdoms of Gold and Salt. A secretive people, they take great pleasure in convincing the Nurians and Kushites that they are simple nomads. The truth, however, is that the Tamasheq have a thriving and advanced civilization, though they take great pains to hide this from the world. Only in their secret capital of Kel Azjer do they flaunt their greatness.

The Tamasheq display signs of their status in their long white robes and colorful turbans, their exquisitely tooled camel saddles, and their elaborate scimitars. Their prowess in surviving desert journeys gives them wealth, valuable trade routes, and a position of great influence. They are expert travelers who can ensure a caravan's safe journey—and also raiders who can destroy even a well-defended caravan or sandship.

VANHU DEWABI: This tribe of nomads wanders the Crescent Desert between the Valley of Golden Ulthar and Nuria Natal, trading with other Tamasheq tribes, the jinnborn, and with city-dwellers in Saph-Saph and Corremel. Their cunning leader Dizsa Zhalar (CN female human cleric 5 [Eshu]) loves to indulge in a spot of camel-rustling when she isn't captivating the locals with her tall tales of adventure. Vanhu Dewabi should have returned to the Stone Desert five years ago to swap places with the Mawai tribe, but Dizsa has no interest in spending the next generation trapped inside the Dominion, so they have stayed away.

VANHU KOZAR: This tribe serves Chergui the East Wind, and its leader Haushi Kewaldi (LN male human druid 10) can converse freely with all the spirits of the wind and rocks of the Stone Desert. By nurturing friendly relationships with these nature spirits, Haushi has been able to steer the vanhu away from dangerous conflicts between those loyal to the Wind Lords and those serving Boreas.

VANHU LEJAI: Led by an imajaghan (elemental paladin) named Salim Remala (LN male human paladin 8), a warrior-chieftain with a fine pair of hunting cheetahs, the

Tamasheq of Vanhu Lejai are seasoned warriors but also wealthy traders. The tribe wanders the western badlands of the Stone Desert around Hartani Bay and trades with merchant sailors from the islands of the Western Ocean.

Vanhu Owey, Vanhu Adagh, and Vanhu Dinnij all serve Boreas the North Wind, meaning that other tribes loyal to the Wind Lords attack them on sight. Fortunately for these three tribes, their ranks are filled with fearsome fighters. Centuries ago, members of these vanhu were among the soldiers hired as mercenaries by the Dragon Empire to attack the minotaurs of Roshgazi, and they remain the best war camel riders in the Southlands. Thirty capable imajaghans from each vanhu guard Boreas's broken tower, which stands atop Kuoma Peak overlooking Kel Azjer. The Tamasheq believe the Wind Lords know everything ever uttered aloud and those who climb to the top of their towers on the high peaks surrounding the city will be granted great knowledge. The towers of the other three Wind Lords are still frequented by the South, East, and West winds from time to time, deterring intruders, but Boreas's tower was abandoned, following his exile, and proves a tempting destination for those seeking obscure knowledge.

Kel Azjer

North of the Chelamite Mountains on a mountaintop mesa lies the fabulous city of Kel Azjer, hidden home of the Tamasheq. In contrast to their reputation as simple herders and camel traders, this city is filled with golden-spired towers, wide plazas, and industrious workshops of skilled leatherworkers, vril smiths, martial orders, and elemental scholars. At the center of the city, a fabulous market runs day and night beneath the four ebony arches that stretch over this golden-marbled plaza. Goods from every corner of the world and beyond find their way here through the Red Portals; two portals connect the city to the outer planar commerce hub known as the Marketplace.

Shrine of the Spider Prophet

The enigmatic Spider Prophet lives in an underground citadel of twisting corridors on the eastern coast of the Stone Desert, guarded by Tamasheq imajaghans who train here in the arts of war and protect its entryways. The Spider Prophet is a perplexing figure, often described as both young and old, male and female, but the prophet always speaks with the same voice from a body covered in swarms of spiders. Many worshippers believe that the swarm is actually the Spider Prophet and the human body beneath it is just a vessel.

Either way, the Spider Prophet possesses immense power. He is the highest-ranking priest of the chaotic desert god Kwansi and is also favored by the wind spirits of the Dominion, who bring him whispered secrets from across the Southlands. His knowledge of plots and machinations in the Dominion is unrivaled, allowing him to plan and prepare for the war with the Dragon Empire that will almost certainly come. The Spider Prophet is old enough to have seen the fall of Roshgazi and Cindass and relishes the prospect of chaos to come when the dragons return. If the Wind Lords decide to go to war, the Spider Prophet will lead the spirits and Tamasheq into battle.

Cindass

Once a beautiful desert port famous for its deep-water harbor and fine white marble buildings, Cindass was the northernmost city of the Moon Kingdom. Much of it was reduced to heaps of rubble by the Dragon Empire's attack 300 years ago, but that was not the end for Cindass. Many of those who survived the attack remained behind to rebuild a good portion of the town. Now, under the wise leadership of Emir Palana Tellisha (LN female minotaur wizard 14) the city's population has grown to around 15,000—half of them minotaurs—and trade with the minotaur strongholds of Kyprion, Triolo, and Capleon is thriving, so much so that the descendants of many families that fled the devastation are returning to their former home. One day, the emir hopes that Cindass will be strong enough to launch a long-overdue revenge attack on the Mharoti.

Those parts of Cindass still in ruin are dangerous and act as a magnet to brave and foolish adventurers. Although a new Labyrinth has been built, the original one from the days of the Moon Kingdom remains perilous, inhabited by feral gnolls, owl harpies, and a pair of devious gypsosphinxes, and is rumored to still hold the riches of Cindass's former rulers. This treasure, called the Golden Ark of Herosh, is the subject of much minotaur lore and fantasies of overwhelming riches.

Roshgazi

Until its destruction by the Mharoti Empire 300 years ago, Roshgazi was the capital of the Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar and the center of western minotaur culture. Today, it is a huge sprawling ruin, dominated by its iconic landmark: the continually changing First Labyrinth. This place was used for trials and executions in the heyday of the kingdom. Now, each day, the crumbling magical maze shifts and alters its configuration above and below ground in unpredictable ways, as the mad artifact known as the *Heart of Roshgazi* switches between its two very different personalities. (This has a cascading effect to other sacred labyrinths in minotaur cities since the mazes are all linked through the Plane of the Great Labyrinth.) Sometimes, the *Heart* is the benevolent "*Poet*" and tries to bring people

There is a fresh hope for the city, though. After three centuries lost at sea, Senator Evadne, master of labyrinth magic, has returned to Roshgazi with ships from the Lost Fleet (see page 168) and believes she knows how to reunite the two halves of the *Heart*. If she succeeds, more minotaurs will surely return to Roshgazi as they have done to Cindass. For now, only 2,000 or so souls make their home in the city. Some are intrepid explorers from the Seven Cities seeking to plunder gold from the deepest tombs of the necropolis; the rest are flesh-hungry ravening minotaurs and best avoided.

MARDAS VHULA-GAI

This goblin-occupied ruined city near the gnoll land of Dabu is home to inhuman brigands, raiders, and slavers. Some say the city's founding dates back to the Ankeshelian expansion—the ruined step pyramids do not resemble the typical architecture of the area and are made from a glassy black stone not found nearby. The glyphs on the oldest surviving pyramids and pillars are well worn and faint, but they bear only a light resemblance to the glyphs of Nuria Natal. These pre-Nurian magic runes glow faintly at night, even after thousands of years, and are one of two reasons why this location is of interest to explorers.

gnolls to cow the rest into submission. He then plundered the giant onyx pyramid at the center of the ruined city with his new allies. However, many of the large tombs and pyramids that hold vril hoards are guarded by the mighty golems of Mardas Vhula-gai and still remain intact and unmolested. These shining metallic constructs ruthlessly attack any trespassers, and they seem immune to most magic and weapons.

OTHER LOCATIONS

The western region of the Southlands remains a mystery to many in the east.

CHEMEKSA: Also known as the Queen's Camp, Chemeksa is home to Ama Ninshu, oracle and ruler of Dabu, Twin Lands of the Gnolls.

JELLE-ANDA: Now a coastal ruin, this was once a city founded by Ankeshelian refugees fleeing their fallen kingdom. It was destroyed by an angry Boreas who smote down every last man, woman, and child.

KHEPRI KHNUM: This great temple of Horus-Re stands on a mountaintop in the Chelamite range and houses Horus's army of 10,000 birds. Its priests are beautiful harpies with tremendous plumage; some are owl harpies.

CORSAIR COAST

To the east of Nuria Natal and the Sarklan Desert lies the so-called Corsair Coast. Here, the kingdom of Ishadia stands firm against the phenomenal power of the Dragon Empire, while the city of Sar-Shaba on the eastern coast holds its fallen princes sealed within its walls. Bold pirates sail forth from Mhalmet to ply the waters of the Tethys Ocean, and slave ships make the long journey from Far Cathay to Shibai and on to Zanskar in the distant South.

ISHADIA

Ask the dragons about Ishadia and they will tell you of how the Mharoti crushed armies and devoured godlings. When the Great Lords carved out their empire, they tore its southern flank from the flesh of Ishadia. What they did not conquer, they washed away by shattering the Great Dam. The legacy of Ishadia lies scattered across the Arandis River Valley, monolithic works of pale stone that some say rivaled the celestial realms.

For generations, the Ishadi clung to the crumbled cities of their forefathers. The dragons crushed them toward the shores of the White Sea but never did consume all of Ishadia, growing weary of the stubborn monotony of war. In the aftermath of the recent Battle of Wheeling Angels, when Ishadia and Khandiria stood together against the Mharoti, things have quieted down somewhat.

The attention of the Dragon Empire has moved elsewhere, allowing Ishadia a brief respite from conflict, but her commanders dare not lower their guard.

ISHADIA

SYMBOL: Horned golden lion over a red background

RULER: General-Regent Atred Mardhu (LG male aasimar fighter 14), and the Council of Commanders

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: Commander of the First Gate Ninshuel the Ancient (LG female aasimar); Commander of the Second Gate Ludari, Voice of the Eternal Sun (LG male human); Commander of the Sealed Gate Khorpa Elegza (LN female human); Commander of the Feathered Gate Lilette Sorgas (LG female aasimar; Mayor Thausis Sharchar (NG male human)

POPULATION: 9,360,000 (9,000,000 humans, 280,000 aasimar, 80,000 gnolls)

CAPITAL: Mardas Adamat, population 98,900 (90,000 humans, 8,000 aasimar, 900 gnolls)

CITIES: Khazephon, population 60,000; Sequra, population 48,000; Shuruppak, population 25,000

GREAT GODS: Astarte (Lada), Az (Wotan), Bastet, Mavrash (Perun), Quorzu (Khors)

TRADE GOODS: Glazed pots, livestock, jewelry, stone, antiquities, dragonhide

The Ishadi still believe their nation to be one of upstanding knights, but they are as often knaves if not outright cutthroats. They share a hatred for dragonkind and a heritage of angelic wrath and passion from a bygone age of gods now dead. Paladin or pirate, the Ishadi are not content to remain the dregs of the south.

CHILDREN OF HEAVEN

The Old Gods and their courts found mortals to be fair and pleasant. Prolific dalliances resulted in celestial blood flowing thick in Ishadi veins and a prevalence of aasimar in the kingdom. Common traits among them are horns or crimson irises. Most cannot differentiate the subtleties with the similarly featured hellborn of other nations.

MARDAS ADAMAT, THE CITY AT THE GATES

Blackened by drake fire and grayed with age, a line of four ancient strongholds known as the Four Gates of Ashadon withstands the might of the Dragon Empire, forcing dragon armies to the south where they run into the Red Desert and Khandirian outposts. The gargantuan fortress-city of Mardas Adamat holds firm at the heart of this defense. Despite dire costs, the people here dare adorn their infamous walls with the carcasses of dragons.

All of Ishadia offer tribute to the Gates for protection against draconic incursion. Military service is compulsory, and deserters are executed. The people accept the strict order, for it has stemmed Mharoti advance for a century.

General-Regent Atred Mardhu leads the stern Council of Commanders, which rules the Four Gates and are thus de facto leaders of all Ishadia. They orchestrate frequent raids to disrupt Mharoti forces.

KHAZEPHON, THE CITY OF BAUBLES

Formerly called the City of Jewels, Khazephon sits at the confluence of the Arandis and its tributaries. Here the Great Dam once stood before the dragons unleashed its captive sea upon Ishadia. Khazephon faced the full deluge, which stripped it of everything save the sturdiest stonework. A second flood, one of people, rebuilt the city. Today it is a gaudy, teeming, amorphous metropolis of lively markets, caravan tents, and shanty districts dispersed between ancient temples and high estates.

The leaders of Khazephon wish to cement the city's position as Ishadia's center, and they are gathering support to return the capital to Khazephon, away from the precarious position of Mardas Adamat.

Atop the broken dam overlooking Khazephon rests old Ishadia's largely vacant palaces and gardens, once home to the Phoenix Throne of Ishadia. Pieces of this throne are still highly prized since they are shards of shimmering ruby said to ring with a celestial tone of ancient enchantments. Lamassu sentinels guard the palaces, driving off or killing looters to protect the secrets of the old kingdom. When questioned, they say they await the rise of a true king to end the interregnum of the generals and commanders. Others claim the lammasu have degenerated into greedy hoarders like the dragons they loathe. Prophecies of a true king are as common as rats in a granary in the taverns of Ishadia.

SEQURA, THE WHITE HAVEN

"Sequrans bleed white" is a local saying. Sequra's streets and walls are perpetually repainted a stark uniform white, covering up evidence of innumerable crimes and violence. Despite its tidy appearance, Sequra is a den of sin, and corruption is an unspoken custom. In the relative safety of the mouth of the Arandis, foreign traders, White Sea pirates, and local guilds that are little more than fronts for criminal orders mingle openly and freely.

Thausis Sharchar (NG male human rogue 8) is Sequra's mayor and the leader of its largest guild. Sharchar siphons off wealth to fund his interests in the former Ishadian colony of Shibai. Ishadia still views Shibai as subordinate, despite the sultanate's booming culture and economy. Recent demands from Ishadia for the restoration of tribute have not gone over well.

SHURUPPAK, CITY OF LIONS

The home of the aasimar and the human army alike, the holy city of Shuruppak is a center of militant planning, training, and readiness, and a place of pilgrimage. At the city's heart is the Basilica of the Golden Lion, one of the largest and oldest temples in Midgard, which holds the Portal of the Heavens, a gateway leading to the first of the Seven Heavens. In days past, the aasimar of Ishadia used the portal to visit their divine progenitors, but such travel is now prohibited by law and custom except in direst need. That doesn't deter scores of pilgrims from making the long trip south to the holy city "just outside the gates of Heaven" from places as far away as Zobeck and Triolo.

SULTANATE OF SHIBAI

The fabulously wealthy island nation of Shibai controls the fabled Showka Passage, the most important route for commerce in the Tethys Ocean, connecting the north and west of Midgard to Far Cathay and the distant lands of the East.

Founded by a loose conglomeration of beys, or merchant households, from Ishadia, Shibai achieved autonomy and is now nominally ruled by Sultan Hyfad al-Khanlar. The real power, however, is gripped tightly in the withered hands of the five oldest and wealthiest beys, who each control a port city along the coast. Their merchant houses control vast fleets of swift ships, port facilities, warehouses, and other implements of trade.

Shibai has seen centuries of immigrants from Far Cathay, Khandiria, Sikkim, the Southlands, and elsewhere, producing a unique blend of human races. The island is focused entirely on trade, with its port cities sustained by inland farms. Ostentatious displays of wealth, including marble palaces, exotic carriages, and public fountains made of carved jade, are the norm for the rich and powerful.

In the capital of Mosylon, City of Golden Towers, the beys compete with each other to see who can build the most ornate palace or the tallest tower. There is even a street literally paved with gold—though the Street of the Golden Queen was laid down purely for shock value and is secured under a *wall of force*. Mosylon's Crossroads Souk is one of the greatest marketplaces in Midgard. Exotic goods from all over the Tethys Ocean are traded here. A sprawling slave market fills the northern end of the souk, where the recent slave revolt started (see page 168).

Cities of Shibai: Mosylon (capital), population 125,000; Ystola, population 24,250; Talut, population 18,845; Masirah, population 14,300; Alhijr, population 10,105; Dumat, population 9,980; Uguar, population 6,320

Mount Erbai: A mated pair of huge rocs with highly prized feathers of shining gold and imperial purple nest at the top of this 6,000-foot-tall peak.

MHALMET, CITY OF FREEDOM

This freewheeling coastal city is a notorious den of pirates, traders, adventurers, and smugglers at the end of the overland trade routes from Saph-Saph, Nuria Natal, and Siwal. Because the city is a prominent port and also attracts caravans from deeper in the Southlands, it brims with valuable goods and materials. It is said that anything can be found on the dark streets and alleys of Mhalmet—for the right price.

Mhalmet is ruled by the dozen or so members of the Black Table, an unscrupulous collection of pirates, thieves, and caravan raiders who command considerable personal power, wielded almost exclusively to line their own pockets. The Black Table regularly dispatches raiding parties to demand protection money from slave vessels, trading caravans, and simple travelers alike. Currently, the Black Table warlords Kikki Longarm (CE female gnoll rogue 15), Velissa the Green Ghost (LE female human sorcerer 9) and Ahmed al-Aksaba (N male human fighter 8) are in the ascendancy, but Mhalmet's politics are volatile and the balance of power can shift rapidly.

Mhalmet is a popular destination with escaped slaves from the Spice Coast or Shibai. The pirates of Mhalmet are always in need of fresh sailors and don't tend to ask many questions before signing up new recruits. Famous pirate visitors to the city include the Istagal Raiders, who wage war on the slave trade (see page 168), the pirate queen of the Spice Coast, Fatima al-Graghn, and the bloodthirsty Intisar the Manacle.

Adventurers in Mhalmet are often drawn to the infamous Sandalwood House, a social club and guildhall where like-minded thrill-seekers can join expeditions into the Southlands to hunt big game, discover lost civilizations, or plunder ancient tombs.

SAR-SHABA, CITY OF THE SEAL

Once the bejeweled capital of the fabled land of Aksaba, ruined Sar-Shaba was rebuilt and warded with thousands of angelic sigils as an eternal prison for a thousand demons.

At its height, Aksaba was a land of arid dunes, shimmering oases, and pristine cities and trade forts. Dynastic marriage joined Aksaba's queens with the Ishadian kings, creating two strong lineages: the Azadim and the Makudai, which together ruled Ishadia and Aksaba in a golden age. The Azadim lineage of Ishadia waned with the years, and eventually the Makudai dynasty emerged to lead both kingdoms for generations.

The united crowns formed an empire stretching from the Ruby Sea to the Spice Coast, and it remained the undisputed power of the white-waved Tethys Ocean—until an Azadim usurper named Harnoch-Khedan seized the throne with a contingent of bound demons in a violent coup. The new king had the servants of both heaven and hell at his command, and his demonic servitors made him feared throughout the Corsair Coast.

Harnoch-Khedan was succeeded by Azhanzar the Proud. Azhanzar lived to see his empire expand its borders but also to watch his heirs sink into infernal decadence and fraternal violence. In his final years, Azhanzar regretted his imperious sins and those of his heirs and ordered the rebuilding of Sar-Shaba according to the Enochian designs in his father's orichalcum-bound tomes. With the last of his power he called the Grand Gathering, drawing the demons his family commanded together. Once the demons congregated, the heavenly sigils trapped them within the newly warded city. Thus was completed the Censure of Sar-Shaba, and the city was sealed.

The princes and princesses who had made pacts with dark gods and demons were trapped too, and in the intervening years those who survived have become powerful demons themselves. Known as the Princes of Perdition, some are starting to stir and seek to break free of the magic that contains them.

The descendants of the Azadim and Makudai lines hold a constant, thankless vigil over Sar-Shaba to this day. It is their eternal duty to keep their ancient kin from unleashing their demonic fury. Both are becoming increasingly concerned by the growth of a new demonic cult called the Seven Wicked Blades that seeks to break the wards over Sar-Shaba.

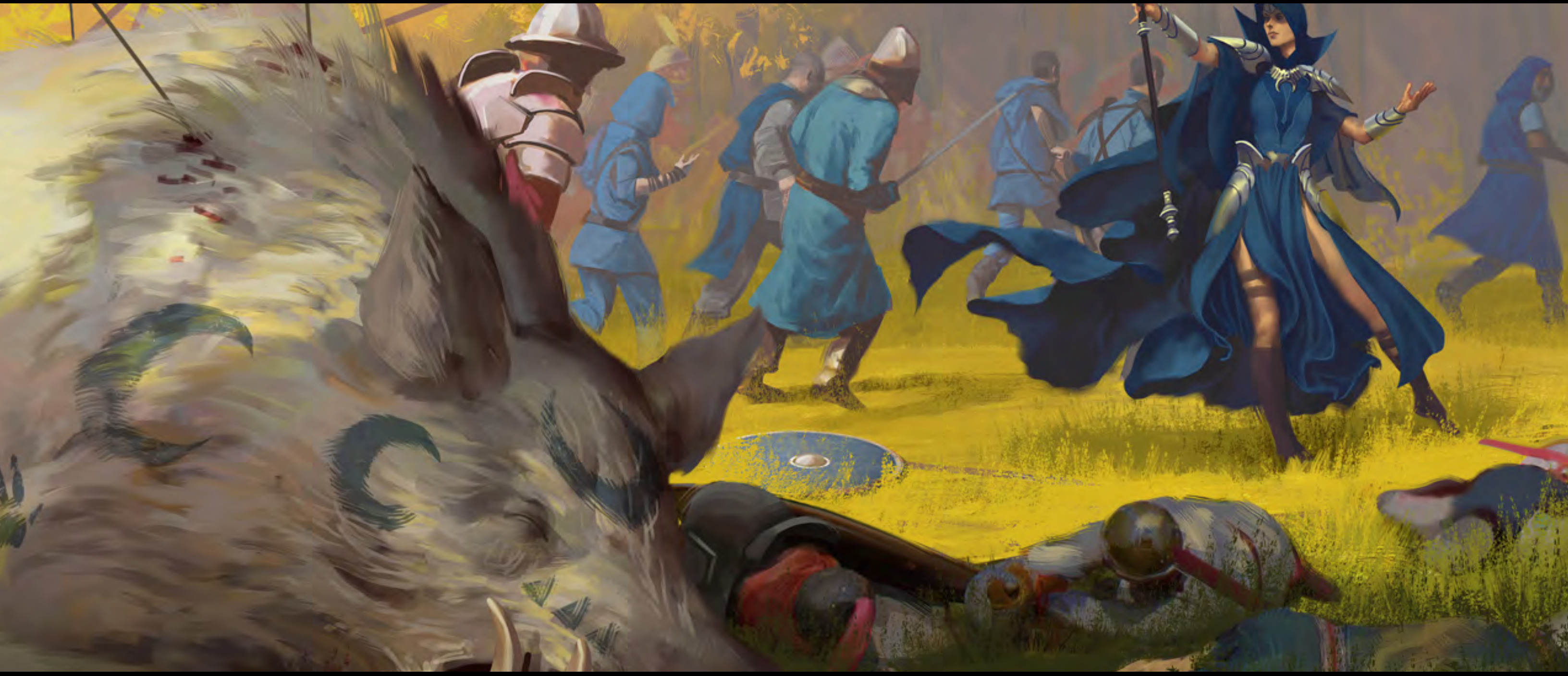
THE SEVEN CITIES

7

War is chaos and it never ends. The Seven Cities embrace and celebrate war as nowhere else. Castles dot the countryside. Private armies and the forces of its various nations march every spring to seize land, cattle, gold, and entire towns. War is a way of life, and its advancements and reversals are as much a part of day-to-day business as the price of bread or the chance of rain. Those leaders who fail to prepare for it find their time as ruler to be short. Only a fool argues for a peaceful year when glory's crown awaits over the border.

This war footing is so ingrained that other regions consider the Septimes—inhabitants of the Seven Cities region—a crazed lot of bloodthirsty, or at least calculating, warmongers. Many come to the cities to earn their coin as mercenaries when the yearly raids and ambushes turn into larger battles and sieges. The lucky seize a general's laurels or a lord's title for their initiative on the battlefield; the unlucky perish.

The people of the Seven Cities fight to show their strength, their divine blessings from Mavros, the wisdom of their rulers, and the cleverness of their generals. They fight because conquest and victory are honorable and righteous.



The forces of Kammae-Straboli suffer a reversal on the field, when one of their war beasts, a ghost boar of Hecate, is slain.

Now, a new reason for war arises. With dragonfire and marching legions shattering the long established shifting balance of power between the cities, it is a time of uncertainty. It is a time of chaos. It is a time for war. In the Seven Cities, war is forever.

A SUPREMELY SHORT HISTORY OF THE SEVEN CITIES

The lost empire of the elves shaped much of Midgard, including its roads, great buildings, harbors, and the monuments of this rich, warm peninsula. Under the rule of the Ostrellian dynasty, the empire extended out from the Arbonesse, leaping along fey roads to the Ruby Sea, to Valera, and much of the Ironcrags. When Emperor Jorgyn stepped out of the world and called the Great Retreat, the empire vanished, and the Seven Cities suffered worse than most.

In the southern end of the empire, the humans and other races relying on elven military might, magic, and even food and water suddenly found themselves without their resented-but-useful masters. Things fell apart quickly around the city of Valera. A dozen generals and mages each declared themselves emperor, though their claims extended little beyond the city walls.

Individual cities found ways to restore a level of security agriculture and law, but each also saw itself as a worthier successor-state than its neighbors. Under the empire, elven governors had skillfully exploited these rivalries, and the sudden collapse of the elven peace meant bloody war ran riot. The worship of Mavros grew far beyond his traditional following among soldiers and sentries.

Those wars have continued for centuries. The peace treaties made when supplies and coin run low fall away with every fresh influx of money and mercenaries come spring. Years of hatred between the Seven Cities run deep, and citizens of one have little tolerance for the bragging and claims of the others. When the occasion arises, however, if one city grows too powerful or an outside power threatens invasion, they find enough commonality to unite and prove to Mavros and the world that there are no greater masters of war.

10 YEARS OF CHANGE

The past decade has been a monumental one for the Seven Cities. To be sure, every year saw the usual skirmishes, treaties, assassinations, battles, and sieges that shift the borders one way or the other. But several events have shaken the Septime states from their endless cycle of war and, for perhaps the first time in memory, have the potential to unify them.

The first great upheaval came eight years ago with the freeing of the sea god Nethus from his captivity in the city-state of Kammae. Instead of unleashing fury over his capture, Nethus joined with his captors, proclaiming himself the good and true husband of Hecate, the patron goddess of Kammae.

Then the Mharoti Empire invaded and conquered the Grand Duchy of Illyria. Suddenly, the far-off threat of the Mharoti became immediate and eclipsed the petty squabbling between the Septime states. Occasional clashes between the cities continued, but the Mharoti threat represented a more immediate danger. In response to Illyria's fall, and with the support of Nurian theurges, a combined fleet from Capleon, Kammae, and Triolo led by an avatar of Nethus annihilated the main Mharoti armada at the Battle of the Golden Wave. More than the actual deed, this victory was seen by the Septime states as a symbol that they could indeed stand up to the Mharoti Empire if they worked together.

The simmering internal tensions in Triolo between Illyrian refugees and Triolan citizens sparked riots in the streets and arson nearly leveled a portion of Triolo's quay. In the aftermath, evidence revealed Mharoti agents had played both sides against each other.

Four years ago, the shadow fey's return to Zobeck resulted in a shade of the Stross Library attaching itself to the Great Library of Friula. One year later, Kammae launched an attack on Capleon as punishment for the Baron of Capleon's dealings with the Mharoti Empire. Kammae forces seized the northern half of Capleon. Two years ago, a virulent disease called "the black strangles" began infecting the horse herds of Trombei. The deposed Sultana Casmara Azrabahir arrived in Valera to aid in the organization of a Septime Alliance. Her end goal, of course, was to gather allies in her ongoing effort to retake her throne.

Finally, two months ago Mharoti dragons razed the city of Gramvar on Kyprion to the ground and landed troops in the nearby city of Chamiras. Though they have not advanced any farther into Kyprion, the dragonkin now fortify their positions as if daring the minotaurs to attack.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Many of the city-states have sent ambassadors to Valera to discuss a Septime alliance to repel the Mharoti Empire.

As the current preeminent navy in the region, Triolo gears for war. On land, it depends on irregulars made up of ex-Illyrian conscripts, Kyprion's minotaurs, and dwarven mercenary companies for most of its strength.

Capleon has powerful interests in trade, but with Kammae holding most of Capleon's northern territories, the military power of the barony is vastly reduced.

Both Hecate and Nethus stand with the oracle while Kammae seeks to expand its power and influence. Kammae's army is known for its excellent archers, and its priests, oracles, and paladins provide a divine hammer to smite its foes.

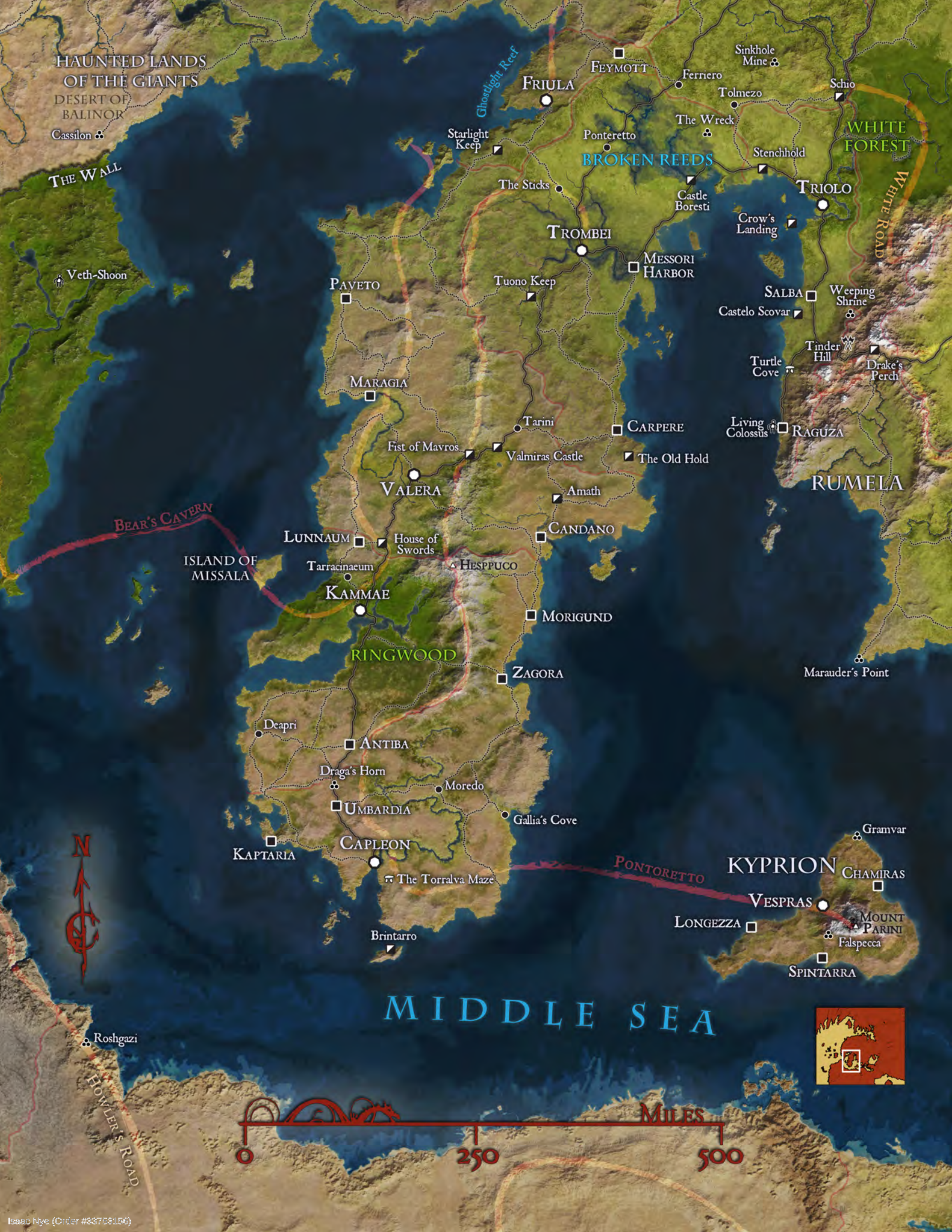
Though fixated on gathering knowledge, Friula stands ready. Its siege engines, diviners, wizards, and kobold skirmishers are well trained, and even Friula's shepherds and scholars are masters of strategy. Currently, however, turmoil from within the Great Library turns the City of Secret's head inward rather than outward.

As the armory of the Seven Cities and the quartermaster as well, Melana's archers and pike troops are especially feared, but the city's cavalry is notoriously weak. With its aim now directed northward, Melana would be reluctant to become involved in expeditions against the Mharoti.

Trombei can truly boast excellent cavalry as well as high-quality levies and a sound officer core. Unfortunately, every time it nears victory over one foe, the other cities band together against it. Its rich granaries and fine warhorse bloodlines give it the strength to stage campaigns each year, but the terrible equine disease sweeping the Republic threatens to weaken Trombei permanently.

Illyria is gone, conquered by the draconic legions of the Mharoti Empire. Now called the Province of Rumela, the inhabitants who did not flee now slave to build fortifications and defenses against those whom they hope will free them.

Kyprion, the capital of the minotaurs, is the site of the latest move by the Mharoti Empire. After razing one city


HAUNTED LANDS OF THE GIANTS
DESERT OF BALINOR
Cassilon
THE WALL
Veth-Shoon
Ghostlight Reef
FRIULA
FEYMOTT
Sinkhole Mine
Ferriero
Tolmezo
Schio
The Wreck
WHITE FOREST
Starlight Keep
Ponteretto
BROKEN REEDS
Stenchhold
The Sticks
Castle Boresti
TRIOLO
WHITE ROAD
Crow's Landing
TROMBEI
MESSORI HARBOR
PAVETO
Tuono Keep
SALBA
Weeping Shrine
Castelo Scovar
Tinder Hill
Drake's Perch
Turtle Cove
MARAGIA
Tarini
CARPERE
Living Colossus
RAGUZA
Fist of Mavros
Valmiras Castle
The Old Hold
VALERA
Amath
RUMELA
BEAR'S CAVERN
CANDANO
LUNNAUM
House of Swords
ISLAND OF MISSALA
Tarracinaeum
HESPPUCO
KAMMAE
MORIGUND
RINGWOOD
ZAGORA
Marauder's Point
Deapri
ANTIBA
Draga's Horn
Moredo
UMBARDIA
Gallia's Cove
Gramvar
KAPTARIA
CAPLEON
PONTORETTO
KYPRION
CHAMIRAS
N
The Torralva Maze
VESPRAS
MOUNT PARINI
LONGEZZA
Falspecca
Brintarro
SPINTARRA
MIDDLE SEA
Roshgazi
HOWLER'S ROAD
MILES
0
250
500

[redacted]

their holdings.

Armies and Navies as of 482 AR

Given the overwhelming manpower available to the Mharoti Empire, it would appear that draconic legions would have no trouble running roughshod over the Seven Cities. However, on closer examination it becomes clear that the balance of power is a matter of training. The majority of the Mharoti forces are conscripts or irregular infantry with basic training. The Septime states, on the other hand, field well-trained and disciplined soldiers. One side has elite fighters (and dragons, to be sure), but the other side has sheer numbers and a tradition of military service from a young age—and the helping hand of the god of war.

The Seven:

Capleon: 4,000 human infantry, 3,500 sailors, 1,000 minotaur heavy infantry, 90 warships

Friula: 2,000 irregulars and levies, 1,200 human infantry, 600 scouts, 200 sailors, 50 wands, 9 warships

Kammae: 7,500 infantry, 3,000 archers, 500 kobold skirmishers, 1,000 ghost-boar cavalry, 500 light cavalry

crossbow dwarves

Triolo: 8,000 sailors, 6,500 human infantry, 2,000 minotaur infantry, 400 light cavalry, 370 ships

Trombei: 9,000 infantry, 2,050 cavalry (500 heavy cavalry), 1,500 sailors, 72 ships

Valera: 10,000 infantry, 1,000 archers, 500 dragonkin edjet heavy infantry, 200 heavy human cavalry, 300 centaur cavalry, various mercenaries and war machines

Associated Nation:

Kyprion: 6,000 minotaur infantry and irregulars, 2,000 sailors

THE SEASON OF WAR

The Seven Cities both revel in and depend on war. Customs and laws limit their wars' gross destruction, provide a season for it, make it a source of status for their generals and nobles that glorifies their power and right to rule, and—not least of all—make war a source of valuable plunder and tribute from weaker states.

Fighting a war correctly requires obeying its limits and forms. The practices and rituals governing war in the Septime lands and the free companies operating there include the mustering of soldiers, the blessings of a company, the taking of plunder, the ransoming of hostages, and the limits of the season.

None of these understood rules and customs matter one bit to the Mharoti of Rumela. The draconic legions fight to win and do not feel bound to any Septime notions of law or propriety.

Mustering and Blessing a Free Company

The free companies gather in the month of Springmelt, or at latest in Sowing. Dwarven companies in the Ironcrags muster early to march south as mercenaries while minotaurs from the south wait until the muddiest roads are clear for marching. Those bound for Friula, Triolo, and Trombei assemble in the Canton of Melana. Companies serving in Capleon, Kammae, and Valera gather outside the walls of Valera, near the Fist of Mavros, an auspicious place.

A free company might include as few as a dozen men, women, dwarves, and minotaurs, with a small train of horses and supplies for a fast-moving scout company, or it might number scores or hundreds. Typically, individual sell-swords negotiate membership in established or newly forming companies rather than directly with employers, but a rare few specialists can make a living as lone soldiers. A company offers its services for the season, defined as the first day of Sowing or after the Rites of Spring, depending on weather and pay. The season ends with the Harvest. Attacks after that date are described as pure banditry by the faithful of Mavros.

[redacted]

Spears and pikes, catapults and crossbows, wands and wards: all serve to seize and pillage lands, castles, trade routes, and titles—but not without cause. The six traditional "just causes" include the following:

- To seize territory to which one has a proper claim
- To secure the blessings of Mavros
- To avenge an insult to a ruler or a people
- To force payment of tribute (and sometimes this is read as plunder)
- To support an ally
- To punish a city for supporting the Mharoti

The sixth cause has come about in the last 10 years, since the fall of Illyria. In truth, most causes derive from long-standing enmities between two neighbors, but all declarations against a foe cite one of the six causes.

Going further back, the cycle of war began with the Great Retreat, when the elves abandoned all their holdings more or less overnight. The war over the succession to the "Southern Throne" started rapidly. Since then, the states have never been at peace for long.

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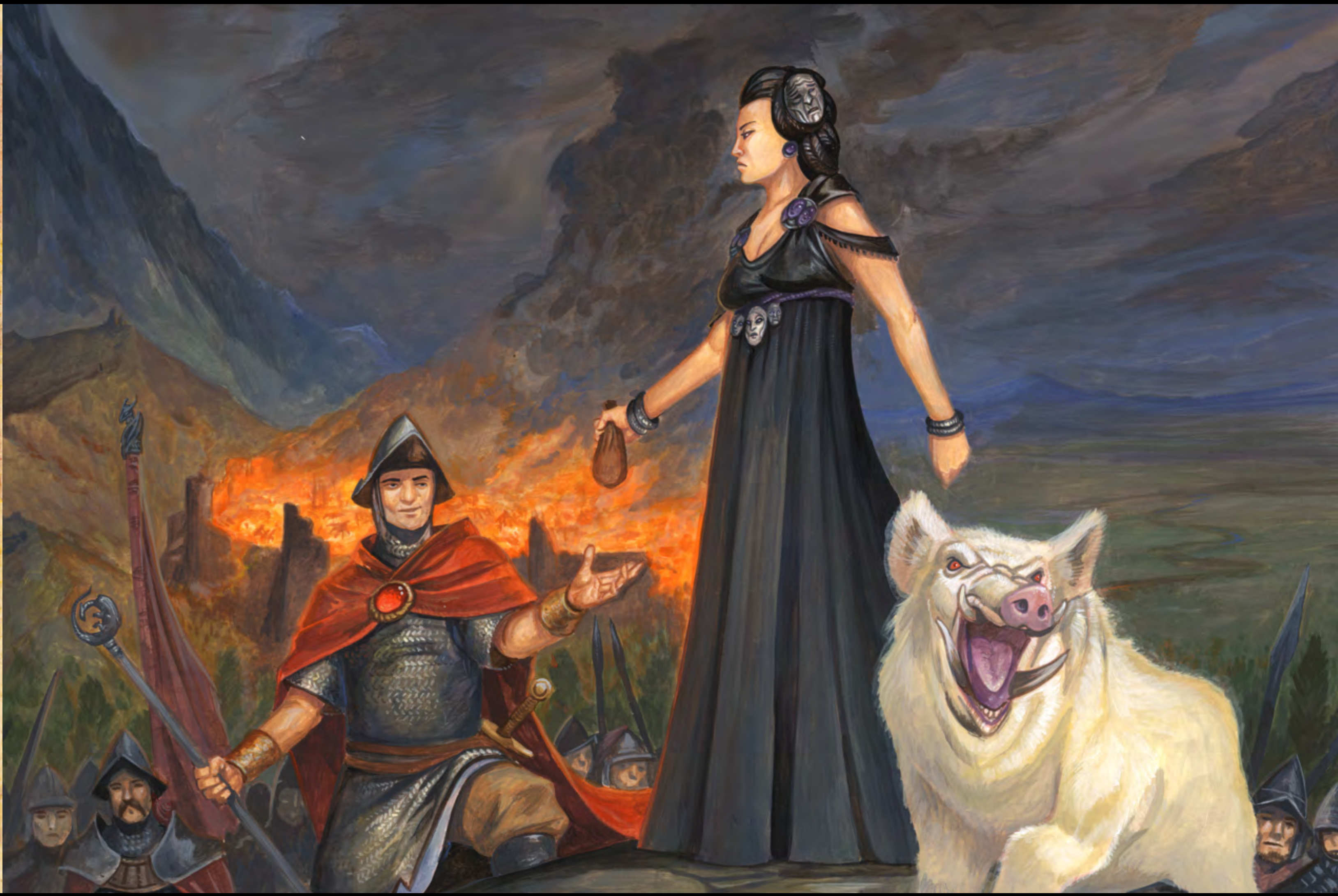


and entertain employers, however. A legitimate company must create articles declaring its name, rules, captain (sometimes chosen by the members, sometimes a noble, professional mercenary, or patron), the division of spoils among its members, the cause they fight for, and the length of their service. All members must sign this contract. Those who don't sign on in the spring receive only half shares.

With their articles in place, most companies choose a priest of Mavros to bless their venture, though those from Kammae petition Hecate for blessings, and the dwarven companies ask for the aid of Perun, Volund, or even Loki. The company wears a badge or insignia so its members can identify themselves, something as simple as their captain's banner or heraldic device.

wealth, but they also make themselves targets for capture, assassination, bribery, and enchantment. When a captain dies or otherwise cannot command in battle, a designated lieutenant or sergeant takes over, but in many companies, a single strong leader both ensures the company's effective operation and holds the whole group together. Opposing forces know this. After their first season, few mercenaries question why free company captains earn 20 shares rather than one.

Triolo, Capleon, and Trombei establish sea companies along similar lines to land-based ones and offer comparable commissions. Sometimes the city owns the ships involved, with the company rounding out the crew or marines, and sometimes successful captains or merchants bring their own vessels. Otherwise, the principles are the same.

Pillaging, Plunder, and Ransoming Hostages

Unlike the mad warriors of the Rothenian Plain or the brutal savages of the Goblin Wastes, Seven Cities armies rarely kill civilians or prisoners.

Most don't even hold the latter for long, depending on how quickly they can secure a ransom or parole. Generals offer an honorable surrender to cities before besieging them. Everyone honors those traditions that compel both sides to refrain from violence, and the payment of tribute can secure a treaty. The purpose of war, after all, lies in the advantages it wins and not the fighting, and if clever words and intimidation can carry the day, the glory remains.

The Septime states follow rules of warfare, though justice isn't one of them. Brutality and atrocities happen frequently, prisoners are sometimes murdered to make a point (though the practice is usually limited to those who fail to surrender or who practice partisan tactics or attack villagers or other noncombatants), and war unavoidably means violence and death. The Seven Cities pretend to a little chivalry, but their commanders are pragmatic, and they rarely show mercy when a foe stubbornly resists or has little ransom value.

Warfare is civilized because it is a matter of status as much as a matter of conquest. The point is to please Mavros, to move a border, and to grow rich. Wiping out a neighboring city defeats the whole point, so surrender does not mean extinction. However, every loss is a humiliation, and perhaps the end of a dynasty and the start of onerous tribute. Capturing a foe and extorting money from their city is better business than killing one more enemy soldier.

As part of the code of war, victorious commanders offer to ransom captured officers and nobles back to their family, city, or feudal lord. The price prisoners bring goes to the captain of the company that caught them, divided up like any other spoils of war. Typical costs for ransoming a powerful or notable personage run to 100 gp per point of Status (see page 24) and 1,000 gp per point over 20.

Campaigning Season

The season begins once the mustering and signing of articles wraps up. The early stages involve gathering supplies and marching many miles to a border. A declaration of war officially opens hostilities, followed by crossing the border and settling down to one of four activities: a small raid, a great raid (cavalcade or chevauchée), a siege of a town or castle, or a formal battle.

The cavalcade or great raid is usually the closest the Septime states come to all-out war. This massive raid attempts to compel a foe to pay tribute or shift a border by devastating a region. Troops burn houses and mills, pillage unfortified communities, chase villagers out of their homes, destroy crops and orchards, and terrorize the population. With the Mharoti threat, all-out war against the dragons seems more likely.

Killing villagers and the unarmed population violates the rules and traditions of Mavros, but in practice mercenary companies and standing armies do murder civilians who oppose an army's foraging or offer resistance or insult to soldiers.

Castles and fortified towns require a siege. These are relatively rare in the Septime, if only because the siege engines, and magical firepower required are expensive, patience runs short, and the cost in soldiers lost to illness or starvation can be high if the siege drags on.

Formal battles are the most common form of large engagement. Mustering troops takes time, declarations of war signal an intention, and the marching armies follow relatively well-known paths and roads, so two armies can find one another without fail. Such battles open with a challenge and retort by the respective commanders (opposed Intimidation rolls) and are then fought during daylight hours. (Nighttime battles are rare but do occur.) The winning side takes its captives and any weapons and armor stripped from dead foes on the battlefield. The losing army, once its commander concedes the field or surrenders his army in its entirety, might retreat intact to its camp. At that point, the diplomats negotiate terms, the sides exchange ransoms and hostages, and the armies march home or on to a second battle.

The campaigning season ends with the month of Harvest, when the levy troops must return home to assist in gathering the supply of foodstuff for the winter months. A few companies fight until First Fogs, but most nobles and captains frown on this second campaign and avoid participating. It's sometimes referred to as a "bandit season," when free companies fail to find worthwhile plunder and try to take something valuable on their way home.

Alliances and Diplomats

Though strength of arms carries the day on the field, only diplomacy can win the larger victories and secure what blood has gained.

Diplomats across the region make virtues of necessity and negotiate agreements harsher than any rapacious moneylender. With aiding an ally one of the acceptable reasons for war, knowing whom to support, ignore, and betray—and when—are important considerations. Those cities and commanders who cannot transform a military victory, no matter how crushing, into a political victory soon fail and fade away.

Diplomacy is as much a contest of wills and wits as warfare, and it is nearly as intricate and endless. Septime negotiators are masters of carefully worded phrases, one-sided concessions, and subtle loopholes that both free their soldiers and trap their enemies. No alliance among the cities holds for long, except those against foreign invaders or one of their own who grows too strong. Only Friula strives to gain more through diplomacy than violence, but even its citizens engage in military adventurism as the circumstances favor.

None of the cities truly desire peace in the sense of an end to all conflict; war is political and economic rewards are too great. Priests of Lada or Ceres favor peace and preach moderation, but the Order of Mavros constantly pushes for war. Some rare individuals have dedicated their lives to peace, but most Septimes treat them as ignorant children or harmless lunatics. The citizens of the Seven Cities know glory comes through deeds of blood, and the battles are a small price to pay.

WAR AND STATUS

War does more than just shift borders and destroy towns. It also builds and destroys the reputations of those who practice it. Table 7–1: War Status describes these gains and losses. Each action listed has a positive and negative value: being chosen as a free company captain adds 2 points, for instance, while losing that title means a loss of 2 points. Likewise, taking a knight or officer hostage for ransom gains 2 points of Status and being taken hostage personally is a loss of 2, per the table below.

The number of participants defines a battle's size. A small battle involves several hundred soldiers. A large battle requires at least 1,000 soldiers.

TABLE 7–1: WAR STATUS

ACTION	STATUS GAIN/LOSS
Captain of a Free Company	2
Lieutenant of a Free Company	1
Member of a Free Company	1
Hostage for ransom	2
General in large formal battle	4
Commander, small formal battle	2
Great raid	3
Leader of siege	4
Small raid	1
Storm/defend castle walls successfully	2
Pillage city	3
Sink/capture ship	3
Take 10 or more prisoners in battle	1

REPUBLIC OF VALERA

Valera is an empire in name only. Its senate is largely toothless outside matters of finance, and its people no longer lord it over half the south with displays of wealth and power. However, the old kingdom has experience, ancient secrets, and a cadre of well-trained, devoted servants of Mavros on its side. Next to Kammae, it is the most devout of the Seven Cities, and many families "give a son to Mavros" either for the priesthood or (for those of the poorest class) for the legions as a spearman or archer.

Valera still thinks of itself as first among equals, and its emperors and nobles remain convinced they will rise and rule again, with or without the elves.

GOVERNMENT

Officially, the Imperial Senate makes decisions for Valera, but in truth, Emperor Loki V firmly holds the reins of power. His political maneuver, the so-called Winter Coup, saw the sudden shift of virtually all governmental power into the emperor's hands, reducing the Senate to nothing more than an advisory council. Despite the loyalty of the army and the people, Emperor Loki must still deftly maneuver through the senators' treacherous schemes as they attempt to regain their lost prestige.

Currently, the emperor bends most of his efforts to creating alliances among the Septime states in order to resist Mharoti aggression. He hosts ambassadors and emissaries at the Adelian Palace, including the deposed Sultana Casmara Azrabahir of the Mharoti Empire (see Chapter 5). The two nobles are weaving a web of treaties between the feuding states while gathering aid, both mundane and magical, from afar. They currently negotiate with emissaries from the enigmatic Wind Lords of the Stone Desert and mighty Nuria Natal. As the only two nations to successfully repel the full force of the Mharoti Empire, securing their aid is vital to Valera's future. An accord to settle the age-old disputes between the Seven Cities could see a unified coalition of Septime states turning its collective might against the Mharoti for the first time.

Chief among the embittered senators, the Imperial Marshal General Carridoc Joderik Kastellan manipulates the Imperial Senate to his own ends. More than 450 years ago, Carridoc was the first human to declare himself emperor, and when it all fell apart, Carridoc escaped into a magical elven mirror. Generations later, the brash and indolent Loki IV—the current emperor's late father—rediscovered the mirror, released Carridoc, and died of poisoning shortly thereafter. Appointed as Imperial Marshal and Regent, Carridoc truly ruled Valera for 15 years, manipulating the Senate thanks to secret access to the Imperial Treasury and tricks of the palace enchantments. When Loki was 15, Carridoc arranged for the assassination of Imperial Uncle General Locovic Pollus and cast blame onto Mharoti agents. With this last impediment to his power wiped away, Carridoc assumed this state of affairs would continue even after young Loki reached his majority. He was sorely mistaken.

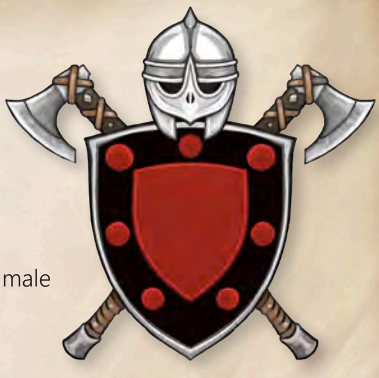
Soon after being crowned, Emperor Loki V proved he had learned many lessons by watching his Imperial Regent and, in the midst of a late winter snowstorm, he engineered his own counter-coup to assume full control of the throne. Carridoc succeeded in shielding himself from direct Imperial punishment, but he now finds himself acting as adviser and castellan instead of wielding the reins of power. Accustomed to direct power, Carridoc currently plans to work through the subverted Senate to wrest power away from the young emperor.

The Adelian Palace

A fine example of early elven architecture, the 200 rooms of the royal Adelian Palace feature enormous windows, open stairwells, and magical lighting at night that follows the footsteps of anyone walking its halls. With mirrors, hidden shadow doors, and a legacy of intrigue, seduction, and imperial power, the sheer weight of the palace's history is impressive. In recent years, the emperor ordered a massive renovation that continues still. All three wings currently hold residents while armies of builders, painters, and artists work to restore the glory of the palace. The emperor, his staff, guards, and the Imperial Marshal live in the first wing. The second wing hosts meeting chambers, libraries, wide ballrooms, and the rooms for foreign dignitaries, as well as servants' quarters. Sultana Casmara and her retinue occupy the third wing; her dragon bodyguards enjoy the warmth generated by magic imbued in the wide rooftop arboretum. The centaurs of the Rhoetian Guard use a separate but connected new building as a stable and training ground.

Secret tunnels connect the Adelian Palace to the Temple City, to the headquarters building of the legions, to the docks on the River Roen, and to several smaller passages within the city. Each of these warded ways opens only to elves, the elfmarked, or with magic (such as a *knock* spell). Called the Ratlines or the Silent Gate, the passages are supposed to be used only by members of the imperial family and their closest guards and allies, but in practice the secret is known throughout the palace and beyond.

AUGUST REPUBLIC OF VALERA



Symbol: Red, with a black border set with seven crimson roundels

Ruler: Emperor Loki V (NG male human fighter 8)

Important Personages: Imperial Marshal and General and Imperial Uncle Carridoc Joderik Kastellan (LE male human); Sultana Casmara Azrabahir (N female human); Emissary of the Spider Prophet, Izem ibn-Tariq (LN male human); Nurian Ambassador, First Charioteer Akara Amasis (CN female ravenfolk lich); Priest-Commander of Mavros, the blessed Armengol de Aspa (LG male human); High Pontifex Miter Konya Mellas (LE male human); Reverend Boatman Vanth (CN male darakhul); Bladesaint Ulderico Vensali (LN male human)

Population: 482,000 (393,000 humans, 70,000 dwarves, 17,000 centaurs, 2,000 minotaurs)

Capital: Valera, population 40,500 (31,000 humans, 7,500 dwarves, 2,000 centaurs)

Cities: Paveto, population 25,000; Maragia, population 18,000; Candano, population 14,000

Town: Tarini, population 2,000

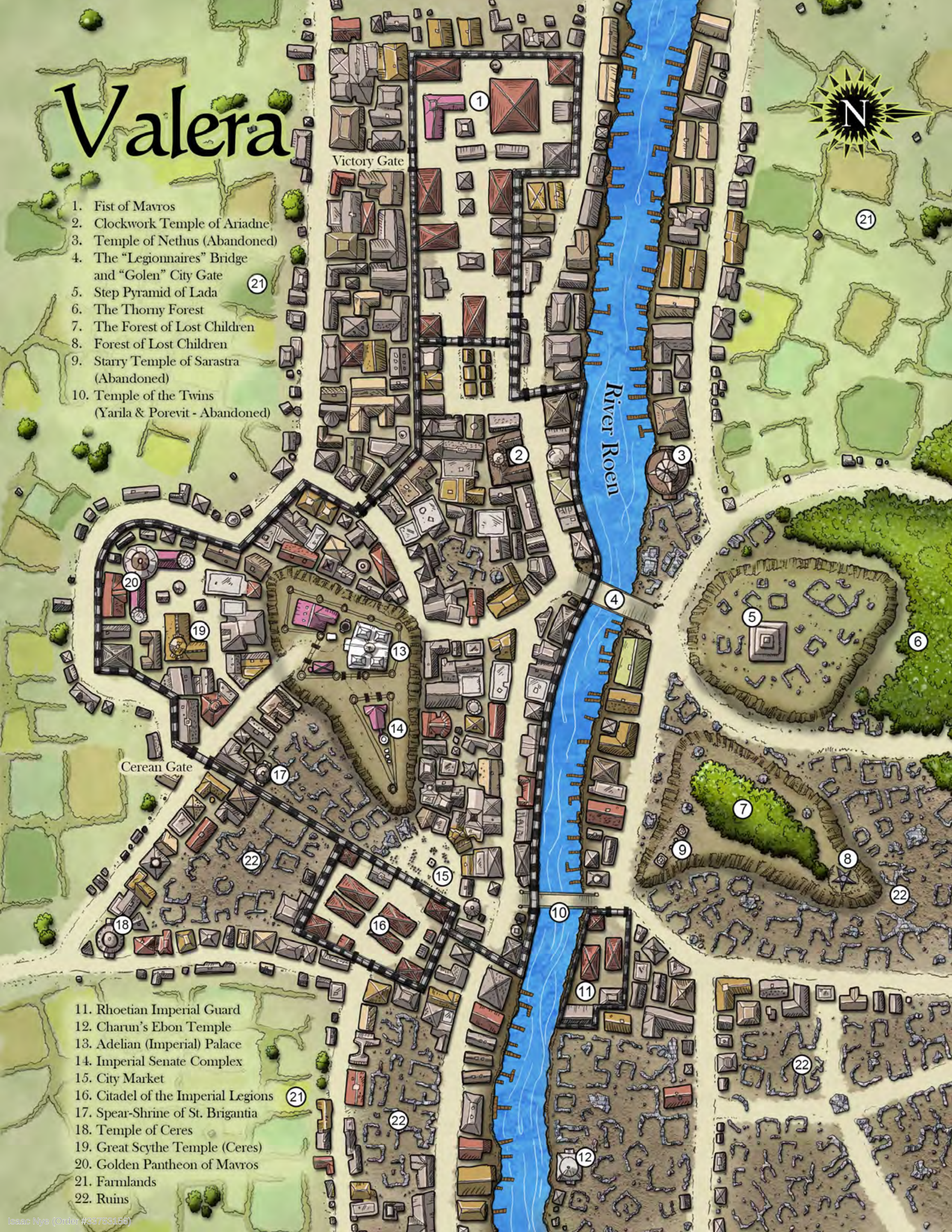
Castles: Amath, Fist of Mavros, House of Swords, Vamiras

Great Gods: Mavros (patron), Ariadne (Rava), Ceres, Charun, Lada

Trade Goods: Mercenaries, elven antiquities, holy water and relic of Mavros, olives, silver

Lost Illyrian Marches

With the Mharoti invasion, the lands once held by Illyria are now another province of the Dragon Empire. But for the people of the Seven Cities, this will never be true. Most citizens refer to Rumela as the Lost Illyrian Marches and believe it is only a matter of time before the brave heroes of Valera, Capleon, and Triolo push the dragons out. The leaders of the various city-states do little to squash such patriotic rhetoric, for despite the difficulty of such a task, hope and vengeance serve to unite the people to a common cause.



Valera

1. Fist of Mavros
2. Clockwork Temple of Ariadne
3. Temple of Nethus (Abandoned)
4. The "Legionnaires" Bridge and "Golen" City Gate
5. Step Pyramid of Lada
6. The Thorny Forest
7. The Forest of Lost Children
8. Forest of Lost Children
9. Starry Temple of Sarastra (Abandoned)
10. Temple of the Twins (Yarila & Porevit - Abandoned)
11. Rhoetian Imperial Guard
12. Charun's Ebon Temple
13. Adelian (Imperial) Palace
14. Imperial Senate Complex
15. City Market
16. Citadel of the Imperial Legions
17. Spear-Shrine of St. Brigantia
18. Temple of Ceres
19. Great Scythe Temple (Ceres)
20. Golden Pantheon of Mavros
21. Farmlands
22. Ruins

N
Victory Gate
River Roen
Cerean Gate
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[redacted]

A host of foreign dignitaries occupy rooms in the Adelian Palace. Ambassadors from the other Septime states and even emissaries from Zobeck and far off Bemmea walk the halls, muttering and planning. Chief among these visiting nobles is Sultana Casmara Azrabahir. The deposed former ruler of the Mharoti Empire plots and plans her return to the throne. To that end she works closely with Emperor Loki. In secret, they conspire to bring the Seven Cities under Valera's banner. With united Septime might behind them, they can retake her throne, leaving the two of them as absolute rulers of their respective domains.

An unlikely friendship marks the strangest ambassadors currently in the palace. The dark and brooding Tamasheq priest Izem ibn-Tariq is often found walking or conversing with the Ravenfolk lich sorcerer Akara Amasis. Despite the occasional animosity between the fiercely isolationist Wind Lords and the aggressive god-kings of Nuria Natal, these two stand as proof peace and cooperation can be achieved.

VALERAN LEGIONS

Human legions remain near the capital, including the Seventh, the Ninth, and the Eleventh, with others on the borders of Trombei and Kammae. Their commander is the Imperial Marshal, Carridoc Joderik Kastellan. Despite more than a decade in command, he has been unable to secure any degree of personal loyalty from the legions. The vast majority firmly support the emperor by oath and preference.

The centaurs in the Valeran army make it truly formidable. In particular, they help Valera hold off the numerically superior forces of Trombei and the fanatical

tradition of centaur service to the Valeran Emperor and the elves is one of the relatively few elements of continuity between the empire and the successor state of Valera. The emperor's personal centaur guard—the Rhoetian Guards—are especially fearsome. The minotaurs, by contrast, are the finest infantry available, largely due to their strength, their superior armor, and their double axes in the Kyprion tradition.

The human captains and soldiers carry on the elven traditions of strong infantry and archery, though certain ancient Valeran elements, such as the elven "running archer" skirmisher, are not reproducible. Human legions depend on ranks of spears and pikes, as well as disciplined use of close formation infantry. This serves the cause well when welded to the strength of Mavros and the zealotry of the Returners (see "Cults of the Return," below).

The newest addition to the Valeran armies, dragonkin edjet heavy infantry and armored lizard riders on loan from Sultana Casmara, now train human levees in their swift striking tactics.

VALERA, THE TEMPLE CITY

The seat of Imperial power, Valera echoes with the sounds of hammers, workers, and construction. Upon achieving the throne, Emperor Loki launched a major reconstruction effort. Now, new neighborhoods arise from the ruins of the old. Despite the rebuilding efforts, most of the temples to a dozen major gods stand abandoned. The elven gods such as Sarastra, goddess of night and magic, or the twin gods of the forest, Yarila and Porevit, have neither priests nor followers in Valera, though occasionally an offering turns up on the temple teps. The great Cathedral of Bright Honor, a shrine to the lven war god Valeresh, has no formal priesthood, though ome soldiers pray there in a remembrance of the elves. Many smaller temples to Baccholon or Holda have been ooted or burnt, and the shrines of the abandoned elven ods seem to frown from the hilltop. The temple of Nethus stands as the lone exception since the followers of the sea god strive to rebuild his temple.

Whitewashed and decorated with gold leaf, the greatest of the temples in the city is the Golden Pantheon of Mavros, where his wife Marena the Red is also worshipped. The High Pontifex Miter Konya Mellas commands the church of Mavros here, and each year he sends soldiers to escort pilgrims to the Seat of Mavros in the Western Wastes. Young and bold adventurers can find employment for such escort duty and receive blessings in return. The headquarters of the Order of Mavros lies in the Fist of Mavros fortress, where new officers receive their commissions in the army and new recruits are inducted into the full weight of Valera's military traditions.

[redacted]

elven secrets, and attempts to restore the past.

- For his own ends, Carridoc Kastellan secretly sponsors exploration of the long-ruined elven defenses outside the city, with their shadow doors, floating lights, and masses of arcane traps. Some of these might unlock shadow roads to distant lands.
- Answering a desperate cry from the House of Swords, the PCs must range out from the castle to recover a young nobleman captured by a party of Kammae ghost-boar riders.
- Acting on an Imperial order, the PCs must infiltrate Amath's heavily guarded building site, determine the shadow fey's true purpose, and sabotage the construction.

[redacted]

CULTS OF THE RETURN

Hundreds of years have passed since the Great Retreat, but many humans have never abandoned the idea that their glorious, perfect, aristocratic elven masters will one day ride back down the Calloggian Way to restore the empire. The emperor and his followers discourage these cults of the Return since they impede effort and devotion in the present.

Charismatic sociopaths such as Obertro Tollis, the master of the Hands of Charun, dominate many of these cults, manipulating their followers' faith for their own private gain. Other Returners, however, are sincere. They seek to repair or maintain the city's imperial glory, half-worship the elfmarked, and fight in the front lines of the legions to show their worthiness to the Valeran lords. Many stories describe Returners who follow and obey elven banshees and shadow fey sorcerers who lead them to unfortunate ends.

Most Valerans consider the Returners more than a little crazy, but their dream has powerful appeal for the poor, the hopeless, and others who long for a return to a golden age. Most priests of Mavros view the Returner's rites with something akin to pity, and the two groups brawl from time to time.

OTHER SITES

AMATH: North of Candano, shadow fey agents portraying themselves as "returning elves" ready, at last, to return Valera to greatness work in secret with a cult of the Return to build Amath, a new magical fortress—the first in centuries.

CANDANO: Valera's major eastern port, primarily outfitted to fight Triolan and Mharoti corsairs and war galleys. Press-gangs on the lookout for bodies to crew the oars are not uncommon.

FIST OF MAVROS: The starting point of the Way of Mavros, the pilgrim route north to the Seat in the Goblin Wastes, this commandery of the Order of Mavros is dominated by militant priests. It also serves as a popular mustering point for free companies and mercenaries.

HOUSE OF SWORDS: Valera's oldest castle, partly of elven construction. Its stones hardened with elven magic, the fort now acts as a strong point against Kammae.

MARAGIA: Valera's major port to the west. An invasion by Kammae was stopped outside its walls.

PAVETO: The backwater town of Valera's northwest, home to footloose mercenaries and street brawls.

TARINI: A garrisoned border town once part of Trombei. It is restive, prone to rebellions, and not yet as profitable as hoped.

VALMIRAS CASTLE: On the main trade route through the peninsula, this fortress is the main training and logistics base for the Valeran army and oversees the movement of caravans and troops in Valera's bloodiest quarter.

THEOCRACY OF KAMMAE STRABOLI

The inquisitors of Kammae know how to strike at their foes' weakest spots. The priests of the Moon Goddess know where and when to attack those foes. The oracle knows how defeating those foes leads to a chain of events culminating in Kammae's ultimate triumph. It is all foretold.

It is a time of change for Kammae. With the freeing of the sea god Nethus as husband and equal partner to their beloved Hecate, Kammae Straboli rises high on a new upwelling of fanatical faith and grim determination. Gone are the days when Hecate held them to nonviolent means; now the goddess demands the nation grow and be strong. Thanks to the aid of Nethus's sea titans and the new ghost-boar cavalry, Kammae has already seized a large portion of Capleon. Guarded by Nethus's scylla, the new eastern shipyards hurry to produce vessels while merfolk patrol the coastline.

Life in the Theocracy is eldritch and peculiar. The nation is populated by a zealous citizenry obsessed with displays of public piety, works of true charity, and great deeds of devotion. Recent conquests against Capleon, the alliance with other Septime states that brought down a Mharoti armada, and avatars of their god and goddess walking among them have turned the people of Kammae to look toward the future with the surety of certain victory.

RETURN OF NETHUS

Twenty-five years ago, Hecate and her oracle Yeneva Podella succeeded in imprisoning the sea god Nethus with a mystical artifact called the *Chains of Kellid*. As an added insult, they used the horrid *amulet of stolen memories* to rob Nethus's wife Mnemosyne of any knowledge of her husband and stole the divine couple's newborn daughter. Nethus was held in his temple in Kammae and the child, Dalyora, was given to Yeneva Podella to raise as her own.

Holding Nethus was not enough for Hecate. She wanted him, his power, and his worshippers to be hers alone. After years of plotting, Hecate corrupted the godsparks (portions of Nethus's divine power shed at the moment

PRICE OF REQUIEM

Requiem is a powerful and addictive drug that allows users to speak with the dead. Made from the death's head mushroom, requiem is a potent drug when smoked. It gives users visions of the dead but is highly addictive. It comes in two forms: a muddy form called Clay, and a refined version called Bliss (see Appendix).

of his capture) and manipulated bands of unwitting adventurers to gather them thinking they were freeing the sea god. However, when the godsparks were reunited with their master, Hecate used their power to remove Nethus's heart, binding him to her purpose.

Unaware of the absence of his heart and fully under Hecate's sway, Nethus believes he is her good and true husband. The precise nature of the god's former enslavement remains a mystery known only among the oracle's closest confidantes and allies. Nethus thinks his captivity was protection after his mind was damaged by a vicious attack from the dragon gods. Now that he has been "healed," the sea god boils with anger toward the Mharoti Empire. To Nethus's delight and the adoration of all Kammae, the oracle has revealed Dalyora Podella to be, in "truth," the daughter of Nethus and Hecate and appointed her as the new warleader.

The heart remains hidden away in a special chamber known only to the oracle and her most loyal servants. There, bereft of both husband and child and bound in the *Chains of Kellid*, Mnemosyne cradles her husband's heart in her hands, sustaining it with her never-ending tears.

KAMMAE S
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The city is a fine sight
houses, all well kept,
pious. Kammae is the
Cities where Mavros
gods, for Hecate and
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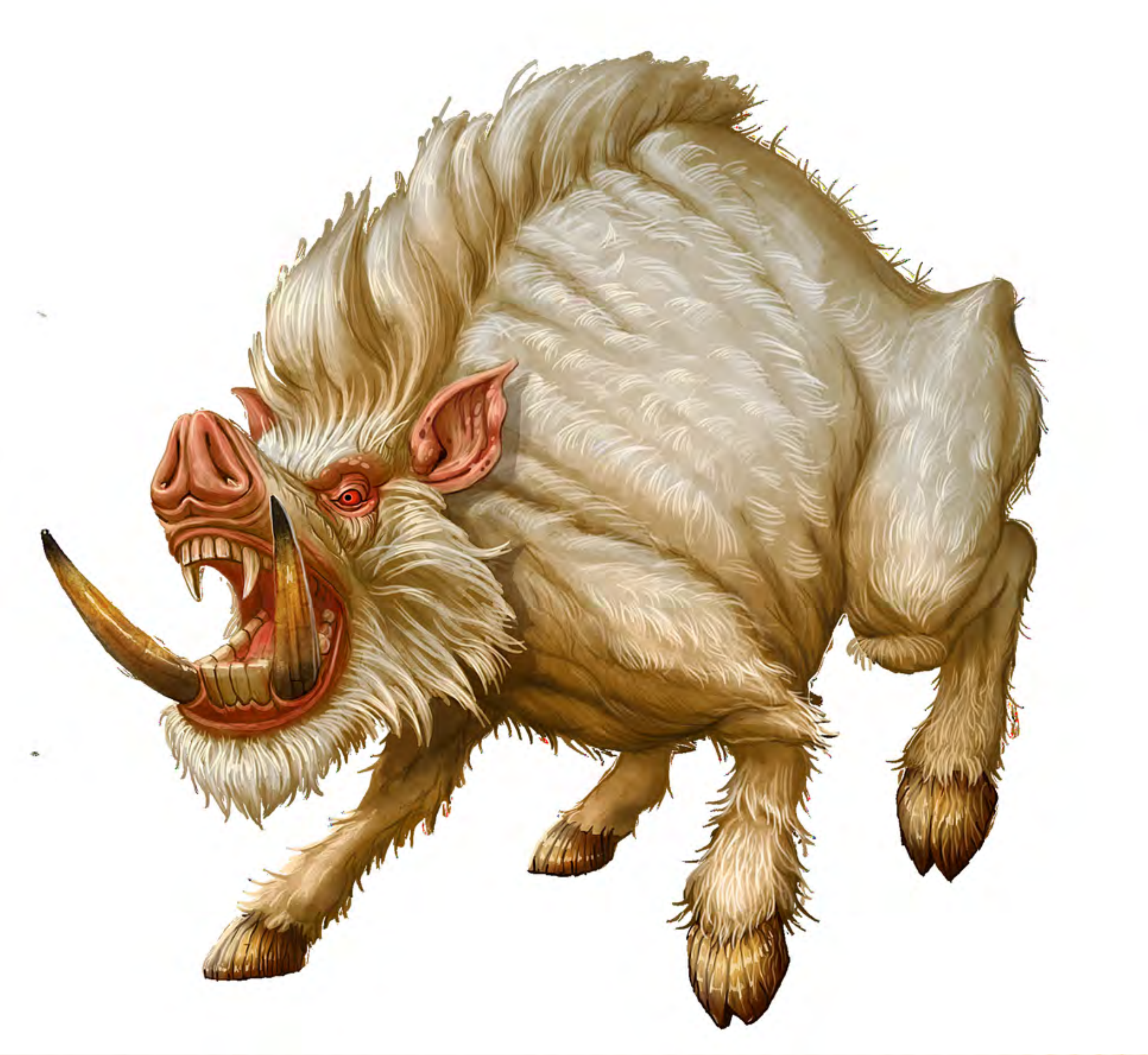
Hecate and her oracle call the nation to grow powerful and Kammae Straboli turns its focus to war. The city's forges create weapons and armor while legions of priestesses imbue healing potions, scrolls, and other magical implements to support Kammae's army. In the fields outside the walls, the ghost-boar cavalry (or "cavallos") trains. Warleader Dalyora Podella prepares Kammae to face the Mharoti Empire while the oracle works to make alliances among the other Septime nations.

Requiem Dens

Kammae's internal difficulties and some of the discontent under the heavy hand of Hecate spring from the fact that many of its novice priests and most devoted zealots rely on requiem, using the drug to speak to the ghosts of elven wizards, dead army officers, or any other spirit they can corral long enough for a few pointed questions. This practice provides Kammae with lore, secrets, and insights not available to rival cities, but it comes at the price of addiction, madness, and death—an early death is fairly common among requiem users. Visitors to Kammae are advised to avoid the requiem dens.



HALLS OF THE ORACLE

The oracle's building adjoins the Great Gold and Silver Temple of the Three Goddesses: Hecate the Moon Goddess, and her sisters Rava the Weaver and Lada the Golden. The halls are gilded throughout the interior and lit by magical lights, dimming only at the new moon. Its altars are redolent of fresh flowers in summer and rich incense and lavender in winter. For the three days of each full moon, the oracle holds oracular sessions, with only the most favored heroes and wealthiest donors guaranteed a hearing. The oracle traditionally sits on the ivory stairs at the center of the temple when receiving visions.

THE ORACLE

The blind daughter of the moon is a woman of 50 years, unmarried as is traditional among the priestesses, and blessed or cursed with divine insight and extreme gifts of healing and prophecy. Like many of her sisters in the Great Gold and Silver Temple, Yeneva Podella was an orphan of the temple raised in the faith—but her gifts shone through from an early age.

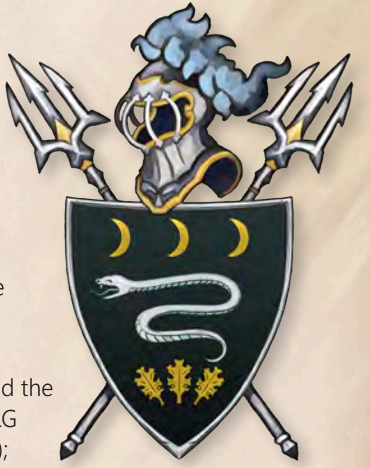
With the voices of spirits, angels, and canny counselors around her, as well as direct communication with Hecate and Nethus, Oracle Yeneva rarely makes a mistake in matters of fact or faith. Though cautious in the past, she believes the encroachment of the Mharoti on Capleon and their invasion of Illyria to be the gravest threat to the Seven Cities. Driven by her own fears about the dragons and the demands of her goddess, the oracle is quick to act and quicker to take risks.

For the most part, she leaves the management of the army to her foster daughter, Dalyora Podella, and concerns herself with larger issues. Privately, Yeneva fears the new direction her goddess has ordered, but so far Kammae's fortunes continue to improve.

THE EYELESS

The inquisitors and paladins of the Moon Goddess are members of a divine order called the Eyeless, answerable only to the oracle, the gods, or their messengers. Their symbol is a sightless white eye without a pupil, and they are both loved and feared among the people. Their elite training and zealous streak make them dangerous to those they consider enemies of the temple or the oracle, though some few are corrupt. Recently, the oracle handed command of the Eyeless to Dalyora Podella, the daughter of Nethus and Hecate, a decision that has divided the rank and file. While many swear loyalty to the new warleader, others see her appointment as nepotism and stand behind the former leader, the Dark Eye of the Moon, Lygren Ullos. The conflict between the two simmers below the surface and threatens to erupt at any time.

THEOCRACY OF KAMMAE STRABOLI



SYMBOL: Black field, a silver serpent below three golden moons, and above three golden oak leaves

RULER: The Word of the Moon and Voice of Wisdom, Her Resplendence the Oracle Yeneva Podella (LE female human cleric 20 [Hecate])

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: Daughter of the Moon and the Waves, Dalyora Podella (LG female legendary human); Lygren Ullos, the Dark Eye of the Moon (LE male human [antipaladin, see Appendix]); Ocean Seer Qorette Mardefon (CG female human)

POPULATION: 179,800 (160,000 humans, 12,000 minotaurs, 7,800 kobolds)

CAPITAL: Kammae, population 37,900 (32,000 humans, 4,400 kobolds, 1,500 minotaurs)

CITIES: Antiba, population 15,000; Morigund, population 14,000, Zagora, population 8,200; Lunnaum, population 6,100

TOWNS: Tarracinaeum, population 4,000; Deapri, population 1,200

GREAT GODS: Hecate (co-patron), Nethus (co-patron), Charun, Lada, Ariadne (Rava), Volund

TRADE GOODS: Marble, statuary, wine, lumber, apples, hazelnuts, religious amulets, charms, icons, requiem (smuggled)

HIGH SANCTUARY OF THE WAVES

Artists work feverishly to transform the temple of Nethus in Kammae from a heavy, squat building into a glorious testament to the sea god's glory. An honor guard of minotaurs with axes usher the faithful into the cavernous interior where a towering wave of sea water held in magical stasis rises up from a central pool. Two or three times a year, during certain high tides, Nethus steps out of the wave to bless the faithful.

The wealthy, powerful, or privileged individuals who visit the High Sanctuary are ushered into private meditation chambers to drink a draught of the *Tears of Memory*. This shockingly cold magical liquid imparts vivid memories, knowledge, and prophesies. Those eager for foreknowledge willingly pay huge sums for the smallest taste of the *Tears*. Few, if any, realize they actually drink the tears of Mnemosyne, goddess of memory.

The temple is where requiem is enchanted and stored for use by the oracle's disciples. Taking any quantity of requiem from the priests without permission is forbidden, and taking it outside the borders of Kammae is punishable by death.

Returned from exile in Valera upon Nethus's liberation, Ocean Seer and priestess Qorette Mardefon runs the High Sanctuary. The new high priestess of Nethus fanatically supports her god, though she secretly questions his change of heart toward his former captors.

THE RINGWOOD

The largest forest of the peninsula, the Ringwood is widely acknowledged to be a dark shelter for outsiders, bandits, outlaws, and anyone else who opposes the oracle's rule. The truth, however, is the opposite. The Ringwood is the proving and training ground for Kammae's most secret and elite military forces. Several small villages and fortified keeps dot the forest, each responsible for the development of a special unit. The most famous of these, Crescent Manor, breeds the oracle's bloodhounds. Another, the Order of St. Gerita, trains the famed ghost-boars: massive dire beasts blessed with fell magical powers by Charon, the god of death. Most of Kammae remains unaware of the Ringwood's true nature.

Aside from the elite military training grounds, the Ringwood is also unique in that it has no elven or fey inhabitants, unlike many other forests of Midgard. The wood does host drakes, wyverns, and other various monsters, and small groups of these aggressive creatures sometimes attack travelers.

ADVENTURES IN KAMMAE

Adventures in Kammae touch on the divine, delve into the war against the Dragon Empire, or uncover dark secrets in the deep forest.

- Without alerting anyone to their presence, the PCs must lead a ghost-boar unit across the northern border into Valera to thwart a covert Dragon Empire sabotage unit attempting to destroy a vital weapons depot.
- With oracular visions predicting a short period of dormancy, the race is on to see which group of brave adventurers will be first to venture within Hesppuco's caldera and reach the volcano's heart.
- Handed a missive from the oracle herself, the PCs must follow a string of obscure clues before reaching an undersea fortress below Missala where an ancient elven orb of the dragonkind awaits.

OTHER SITES

ANTIBA, THE CITY OF STONE: Antiba quarries fine stone, including blue-veined marble and a variety of pink granite, and boasts some of the finest sculptors in the Septimes. Its workshops turn out religious and memorial statuary in great numbers. The minotaurs of Kyprion and the priests of the Dragon Empire pay well for this quality stone, making it one of Kammae's few exports.

DEAPRI: In the town of roses, Ceres and Lada are beloved and Hecate has only a small following. The city is famous for its bloodhounds and hunting hawks, both said to be magically intelligent and tractable.

HESPPUCO, THE SMOKING MOUNTAIN: Kammae's famous semi-active volcano spews ash every few years to bury the land around it. The Smoking Mountain shelters salamanders, fire elementals, and even swarms of black-scaled kobolds. Some say a dragon also lairs here. True or otherwise, a few groups of brave souls who explore the caldera go missing every year.

LUNNAUM: Best known for its sheep, vellum, vineyards, and scriptoria, Lunnaum is a city of monastic silences, smithies casting bells, and blessings given to soldiers heading north to fight in wars far from Kammae. Sometimes called the City of Farewells.

MISSALA, THE INDOLENT ISLAND: The Valeran Emperors enjoyed luxury and privacy in their Diamond Palace on this small island west of Kammae. Now abandoned and haunted by banshees, ghosts, will o'wisps, and other spirits, the palace's ruins still remain. Legends say vast fortunes in gold, platinum, mithral, orichalcum, jewels, and magic lie buried beneath its crumbling masonry. The island's guardians include everything from oblin sharks to terrible sea serpents, and no sane captain oes anywhere near it.

MORIGUND: A thriving city fretting about the dangers f Valeran expansion and Triolan raiders, Morigund upports the oracle wholeheartedly. It holds the rich eastern slopes of Hesppuco for Kammae.

TARRACINAEUM: This elven resort town was buried by volcanic ash from one of Hesppuco's occasional eruptions. Over the past decade, a massive archaeological effort has uncovered portions of the city. However, gruesome murders, disappearances, and strange symbols of ash and fire slow the search for elven treasures.

ZAGORA: Once a small seaport, this town is the site of Kammae's efforts to build up its naval forces. Zagora is filled with shipwrights, construction slips, and naval officers. It also controls an important road over the hills to the Ringwood.

Barony of Capleon

A major trading location from the founding of the Seven Cities, Capleon once styled itself as the Barony of Capleon, Cindass, and Roshgazi and grew rich on its merchants and bankers. Recent setbacks have shrunk both the borders and its future prospects. In a bold or perhaps foolhardy move, Baron Cazagoza attempted to court an alliance with the Mharoti, leveraging Capleon's financial prowess to buy protection from its Septime rivals. His plans backfired spectacularly.

The fall of Illyria, the victory over the Mharoti armada, and the revelation that Capleon's Temple of Seggotan conspired with the dragons against the sea god Nethus has turned public opinion against any accommodation with the Mharoti Empire. So-called patriots drive dragonkin from the barony, cutting off vital trade and income and infuriating the Mharoti. Ambassadors from Triolo and Kammae threaten Capleon against any draconic alliances, but Baron Cazagoza fears his negotiations have progressed too far for him to cast them aside. With heroes and bankers alike calling for the baron's removal, Capleon frequently trembles on the brink of internal revolt or murderous rioting.

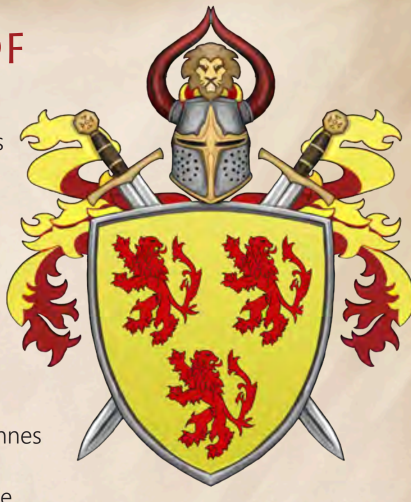
GOVERNMENT: THE BARON

Showing the signs of age and stress, the dark-skinned Baron Raúl Cazagoza seems primarily interested in pretending his good fortunes remain undiminished—throwing festivals, buying ancient artifacts, and inviting scholars, bards, and adventurers to his glittering court. Secretly, the increasingly desperate grandee steers the Capleoni city councils through secret meetings, blackmail, and bribery. Though the baron usually gets what he wants, it is becoming harder to cause mayors, officials, or detractors to vanish into Lion's Rock. The "Southern Lion" pretends to drowsy apathy while working furiously to keep the barony whole while scheming to recover its lost territories.

Cazagoza's enemies abound, and his allies grow fewer and more frightened. Called traditionalists, those who stand against the baron loudly oppose the Dragon Empire and consider the Mharoti a common enemy. The traditionalists include a majority of the citizenry, all minotaurs, and most followers of Mavros, and the common cause parties typically feature the Ambassador of Triolo, Arcenzo Mudazzo, and the Ambassador of Valera, Brimas Val.

Once a title of respect and honor, the shrinking ranks of the Baron's Men remain Cazagoza's most loyal allies. Their membership includes most of the City Council and a minority of the merchant navy captains, many of whom owe the baron for their positions. The common citizens view the Baron's Men as corrupt political mouthpieces and symbols of scorn.

BARONY OF CAPLEON



Symbol: Three red lions regardant on a golden field

Ruler: Baron Raúl Cazagoza (LN male human rogue 7)

Important Personages: Ines Cazagoza Ayeshi (CG female human); Johennes of Salzbach (CN male elfmarked human); the Blade in the Dark, Caliana the Teaseller (LE female human); Master of the Tumbles, Durant Grasa (CN male dwarf); Ambassador of Triolo, Arcenzo Mudazzo (N male human); Ambassador of Valera, Brimas Val (LN male human); High Elder Potnia Adrasta (NG female minotaur); Perro Omjaya (CN male human)

Population: 710,000 (510,000 humans, 200,000 minotaurs)

Capital: Capleon, population 39,500 (32,000 humans, 7,500 minotaurs)

Cities: Umbardia, population 20,000; Kaptaria, population 18,000

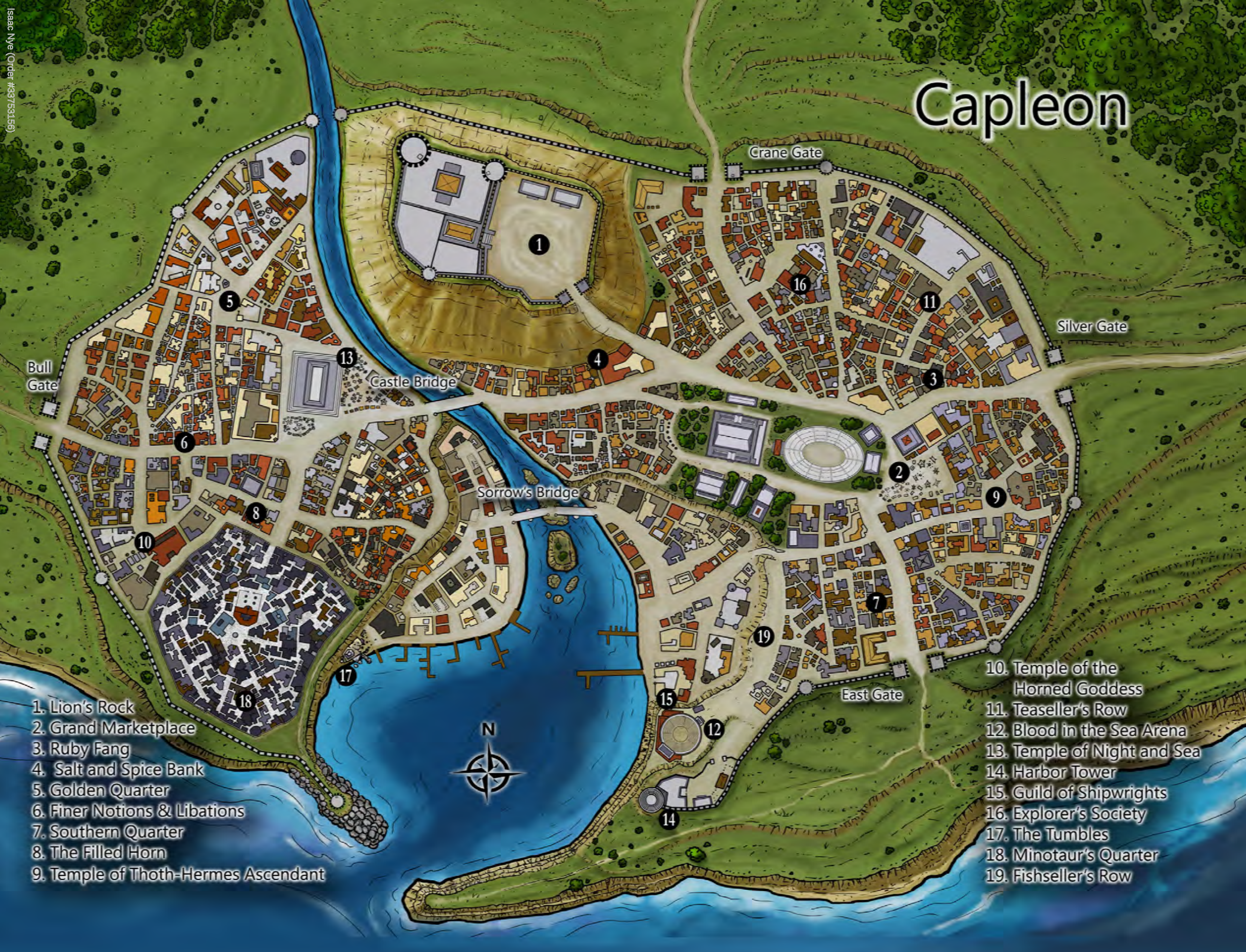
Towns: Moredo, population 3,100; Brintarro, population 3,000; Gallia's Cove, population 500

Great Gods: Ariadne (Rava, patron), Mavros, Ceres, Charun, Nethus, Hecate

Trade Goods: Finance, salt, spice, wine, olive oil, tin, copper, lavender, saffron, red pepper, tea

More worrying, two outspoken, homegrown rivals threaten Baron Cazagoza's plans and perhaps even his position. His cousin Ines Cazagoza Ayeshi heads La Pregunta, a social and political movement demanding an inquiry into the depth of the baron's dealings with the Mharoti Empire. Fiery and driven, Ines enjoys the support of many of the younger nobles in the Barony, but secretly her main source of funds is Caliana the Teaseller. The other rival, Johennes of Salzbach, is a hero of the recent naval victory over the Mharoti. The elfmarked mercenary personally captured the sultan's own admiral, the dragonkin Volkan Demir, and placed Cazagoza in the uncomfortable position of having to ransom the

Capleon


Crane Gate
Silver Gate
Bull Gate
East Gate
Castle Bridge
Sorrow's Bridge
N
1. Lion's Rock
2. Grand Marketplace
3. Ruby Fang
4. Salt and Spice Bank
5. Golden Quarter
6. Finer Notions & Libations
7. Southern Quarter
8. The Filled Horn
9. Temple of Thoth-Hermes Ascendant
10. Temple of the Horned Goddess
11. Teaseller's Row
12. Blood in the Sea Arena
13. Temple of Night and Sea
14. Harbor Tower
15. Guild of Shipwrights
16. Explorer's Society
17. The Tumbles
18. Minotaur's Quarter
19. Fishseller's Row

dragonkin back to the empire—the negotiations for which are still ongoing. Johennes recently married into a minor Capleoni noble house and is the spokesman for the Banker's Alliance, a union of trading families furious over the loss of income and trade under Cazagoza's rule.

Capleon, City of Peace

The city of Capleon is wealthy due to trade, and trade has led it to develop sophisticated banking instruments. Its bankers are shrewd and ruthless in pursuit of efficient, wise uses of Capleon's position—most of the time. Many buy private armies, spend vast sums currying favor, or gain fortunes (and sometimes lose them again) on risky ventures. Capleon always held itself as a safe place to do business, but that stability might be failing fast. Once, just under half of the city's bankers came from the Mharoti Empire or Southern realms like Nuria Natal, but now, with the dragonkin driven out, new financial opportunities arise for native Capleoni.

The Lion's Rock

The baron's castle has an incredible view over the city from its steep hill, and a fantastic series of gardens and fountains as well. The baron's personal tower is called the Keep of the Scarlet Flame for the rich paint on its exterior. The Rock's other towers house the realm's mint, a garrison of personally loyal and proven troops, and the ambassadors from Nuria Natal, Trombei, Valera, Triolo, and even distant Salzbach and Zobeck.

Beneath the Lion's Rock lies a second, hidden stronghold where political prisoners languish in pain, wizards work their craft to extract information from rebels and saboteurs, and the baron punishes those who dare to speak openly against him.

Salt and Spice Bank

The marketplace for salts and spices has become a trading floor where goods of every kind are sold without being present. They sit in warehouses or even aboard ships not yet arrived while merchants and traders bid and bargain for them. This marvel confounds most visitors from less sophisticated markets, but fortunes are won and lost here every season.

The financiers who operate by this set of informal practices, unspoken understandings, and loose regulations are called the Salt and Spice Bank. The largest trading families include the Caronova, Frulaneti, Legatay, Omjaya, and Ayeshi. The major families often commission merchants or captains to bring in specific goods or sponsor luxuries on speculation. Such financial backing comes with interest, however, and the investors invariably make their profit even if the people they back do not.

Though rivals on the floor, the investors unite in the Banker's Alliance against what they see as the tyrannies of Baron Cazagoza. Believing in the Alliance's promises to restore lost trading routes, many Capleoni merchants vocally call for Johennes of Salzbach to be put on the Lion's Throne. The official spokesman of the bankers is Johennes of Salzbach, but all know Perro Omjaya truly controls matters. A white-bearded and bald-headed man who spends most of his time speaking to messengers and composing shrewd deals, Perro's long fingers touch trade from Bemmea to Harkesh and beyond. Always at his side is a small black rat, which has given him the unofficial nickname "Grandfather Whiskers."

Southern Quarter

In the time of chaos in the Southern deserts, the minotaurs fled to Capleon by the thousands and established their own communities, and so did the shaven-headed men of Nuria Natal and the olive-skinned merchantwomen of Cindass.

The immigrants live in the Southern Quarter, and here the temples of Thoth-Hermes and the Horned Moon Goddess hold sway. Rich, complex, and polyglot, blood and family count the most here, and gangs wage shadowy war for control over the streets and back-alleys. The Nurian assassin Nebit Kanika (LE female ravenfolk rogue 2/sorcerer 4), the fanatical Grandmaster Hermano Garduna (LE male human cleric 6 [Mammon]), and the kobold street king Quelleck Redhand (LE male kobold sorceror 10) all lead gangs of toughs and thugs in the Southern Quarter. The minotaurs alone remain uncorrupted.

When young hotheads get out of hand, heavy fines come down on their elders and their streets. So far, this has kept the civil disturbances manageable.

Teasellers' Row

As the Banker's Alliance expands Capleon's trade agreements with a number of cities, and shipwrights lay down new keels for the baron's fleet on a weekly basis, the weapon that the Barony of Capleon keeps sheathed and silent is Teasellers' Row, the Guild of Poisoners. These assassins make the nation a byword for smiling treachery and agonizing murder, and rightly so.

Capleon's assassins strike down arrogant bankers, failing sea captains, foreign spies, and even nobles of the realm who fail to support Baron Cazagoza enthusiastically enough—and can also be commissioned to remove difficult foreign ambassadors, overreaching minotaur corsairs, or annoying preachers of sedition and revolt. Their hearts stop, their dogs savage them on the hunt, or their ships mysteriously sink. Death comes from a thousand snares, and those who dare accuse the baron of using assassins disappear as well.

The guild's leader is Caliana, a woman of long experience with poison and death. Some claim she is a witch, while others believe she has made a pact with devils. The truth is, she works brilliantly, humbly, and without the need for braggadocio or public recognition. Her results are her legacy. Caliana has a steely determination to keep Capleon whole and independent. Despite her loathing for the attempted arrangements with the Mharoti Empire, she does not have enough real evidence to move directly against the baron. Thus, she secretly supports Ines Cazagoza Ayeshi. Should the Teaseller's poisons or blades aid the young noblewoman in keeping Capleon free, so be it.

Blood of the Sea Arena

Built over sea caves and blowholes that are sometimes left open to bring a wash of salt water into the area, this amphitheater is used for bullfights, traditional minotaur warrior rituals, and gladiatorial combats between captured prisoners and the best-armed troops of Capleon's legions.

The results are not predictable, but the mess is washed out at the next high tide. Events are staged weekly or at festival times. The master of fighters is Captain Shushu (male human fighter 5/rogue 5), a braggart from Nuria Natal whose skill with a blade matches his claims. He recruits, trains, pays, and buries the fighters in the baron's stable, who take on all challengers. Wagering is often ruinously heavy.

The baron privately despises the arena as a waste of talent, time, and money, but he is canny enough to realize the games allow humans and minotaurs to blow off steam they might otherwise direct against fellow citizens. The contests are closely watched by a large contingent of guards; mob violence is dealt with harshly.

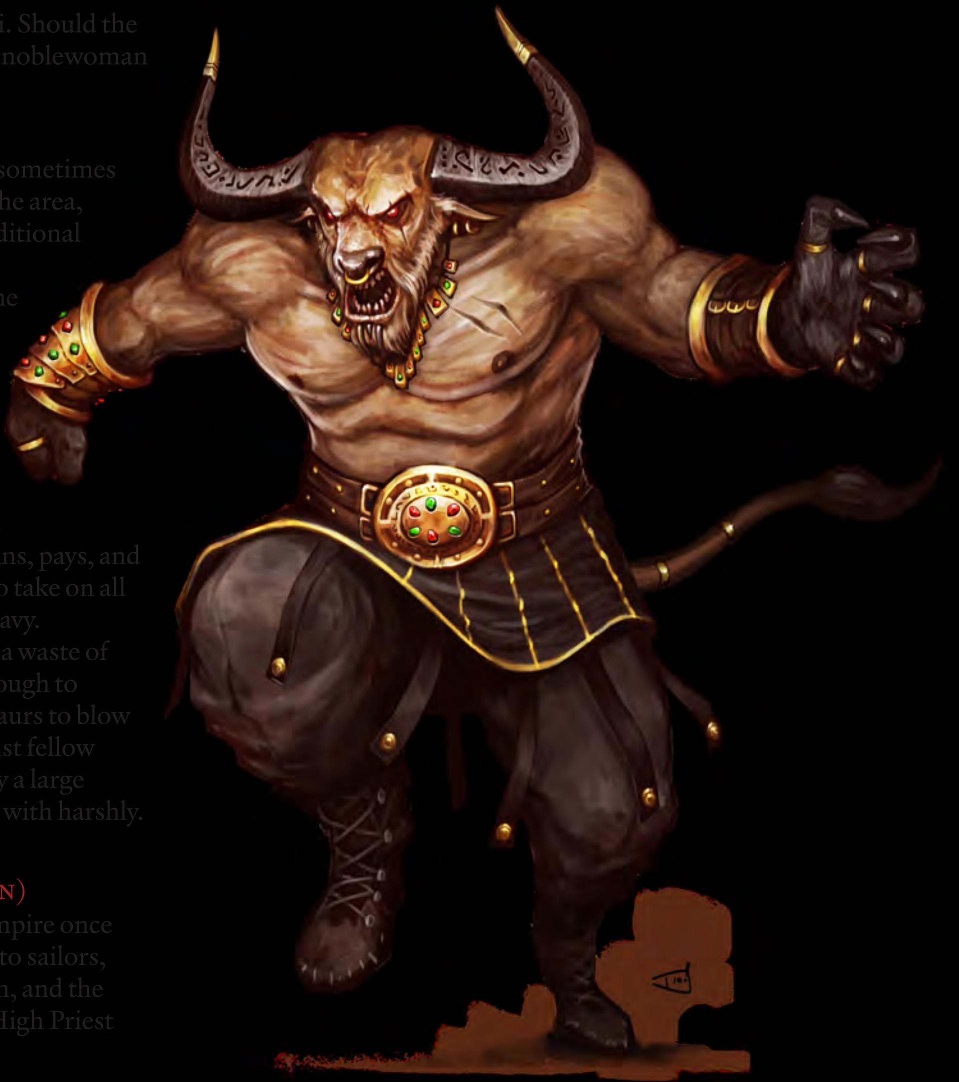
The Tumbles (Ruins of the Temple of Seggotan)

A church of the water god of the Dragon Empire once stood at the edge of the harbor and catered to sailors, those who fished the Middle Sea, dragonkin, and the occasional merfolk. Then six years ago, as High Priest Jabara prepared to bless the ships departing to join those assembling to thwart the Mharoti armada, Nethus rose from the harbor. In a voice carrying across the city, the sea god denounced the Temple of Seggotan for aiding in the attack upon his divine person and conspiring with the Mharoti Empire. Nethus laid waste to the temple, casting down the green-and-blue-veined marble towers and galleries until nothing remained but rubble.

Today, the ruins are called the Tumbles and play host to a motley mix of smugglers, rogues, and true believers. On the surface, a crude neighborhood of tents and makeshift dwellings offers a thriving black market in stolen or prohibited goods. Below, surviving tunnels and sub-chambers form the "royal court" of Master Durant Grasa. The dark and boisterous Lord of the Tumbles holds his band together with cunning and fierce charisma.

Temple of Night and Sea

The appearance of Nethus in Capleon harbor inspired, shocked, and enthralled many in the barony. Six years later, along a lovely canal, the bones of a new cathedral



Adventures in Capleon

Adventures in Capleon involve rivalries between the various races and factions and conflicts between past hatreds and future opportunities.

- The time has come to expose the baron's dark dealings, but to do so the PCs must infiltrate the closed city of Brintarro and raid the vault beneath the baron's summer fortress.
- The Mharoti offer the PCs a fortune in gold and magical items if they can pull off a daring heist and rescue Admiral Volkan Demir from beneath Lion's Rock.
- Ventis Legatay, a minor official of the Legatay Family, hires the PCs to venture into the Tumbles to recover the Mantle of Seggotan, an artifact Ventis believes survived the destruction of the temple.

rise to honor Nethus and Hecate. When it is complete, the Temple of Night and Sea will be the largest church in the Seven Cities. The construction goes quickly as artisans, crafters, wizards, and priests work side-by-side with tools, spells, and prayers. The minotaur High Elder Potnia Adrasta oversees every aspect of her new cathedral. Also the leader of Capleon's minotaur population, she deals with obstacles by charging through them with no pity to those crushed beneath her.

Other Sites

Brintarro, the Arsenal of Capleon: The site of great shipyards and a bulk buyer of Kyprion rope and sailcloth, Brintarro is a fortified and closed city, forbidden to outsiders and well guarded by the baron's most loyal troops and sailors. The city turns out at least a dozen warships a year, and many more in times of conflict with Triolo or the Mharoti. Visitors are rarely welcome.

Draga's Horn: A small but well-sited keep once held this crucial road through the hills between Kammae and Capleon. Famed for its dragon-bone-ribbed great hall, the fort was sacked and burned by a Kammae raid three years ago. Now, a ghostly drake haunts the ruins trying to piece its own skeleton back together.

Gallia's Cove: A fishing village known for its friendship with dragonkin and sea folk. Smugglers and spies flock here to avoid official ports.

Kaptaria, the City of Minotaurs: A sanctuary for the old ways and a haven for the traditionalists of Capleon, Kaptaria tops a fortified hill and began as an early Kyprion colony on the mainland. The city has no temple of Seggotan, though Nurian descendants do keep a small shrine to Thoth-Hermes. Secret shrines and societies are everywhere as Kaptaria's residents can finally revel in the anti-dragon sentiment they have long held.

Moredo: A small but fertile town of wheat, rye, barley, and poppies, perhaps the quietest town of Capleon. Oddly, its shrine to Charun is a place of pilgrimage for many, and caves riddle the earth with hidden springs and shrines.

The Torralva Apparatus: Residing in a remote manor house and the hill below it, this twisting maze of glass tunnels, eldritch chambers, beaked plague doctor constructs, and alchemical devices is the product of the mad healer Doctor Torralva who vanished within. The entire structure functions as a huge alembic, transforming those who enter into . . . something else. None who have braved the Apparatus have emerged.

Umbardia: The second city of Capleon has rich tin and copper mines and enormous olive orchards and fields of lavender. Currently under martial law to suppress a wave of protests and riots, its people are staunch traditionalists opposed to the baron's dabbling with the dragons.

Canton of Melana

Ancient prophecies of the king's return grow closer to fulfillment, and Melana prepares for the greatness approaching. The forested hills of the Canton of Melana sit strategically between the Free Cantons of the Ironcrags, the Magdar Kingdom, the Duchy of Verrayne, the wild White Forest, and the Republic of Triolo. Melana controls the eastern gateway to the Seven Cities and a great deal of the overland trade into and out of the region, including the Lowland Road to the Free City of Zobeck. Rich in natural resources and blessed by an advantageous location, Melana's usual internal discontent has been polarized by the recent election of Seppo Voller to the censorship. As unlikely allies, dwarves and kobolds of the Undercity look toward the Free Cantons as a kingdom to liberate while the above ground human majority struggles to remain free of foreign entanglements. Both sides know matters will never be the same in the Canton of Melana.

GOVERNMENT: THE CENSORS

Two censors govern the Canton of Melana, chosen every five years by a small group of electors. The complicated formula for suffrage results in 30 of the wealthiest citizens qualifying as electors. Merchants, bankers, artisans, and even the occasional mercenary leader compete fiercely for these positions, and the censors grant lucrative contracts as rewards for support.

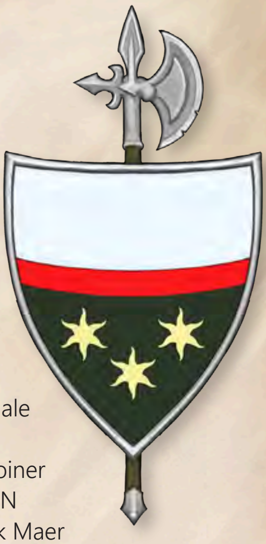
Traditionally, one human and one dwarf have served together as censors. The recent elections of the influential dwarf Seppo Voller and the human Jacopo Massaro produced two censors with radically different visions for their land. While the expansionist Voller oversees a massive increase in weapon, armor, and magic item production, the isolationist Massaro bargains with ambassadors from the Free Cantons, Magdar, and Verrayne. With the censors unable to see eye to eye, Melana pulls itself two different directions.

Melana, City of Iron

An architectural marvel, the city of Melana sits proudly at the intersection of three trade routes in the Ironcrag foothills, with excellent access to Tijino Pass. Behind its massive defensive wall, wide flagstone streets provide easy access to the city's many marketplaces and public courtyards. The tall, slender towers of villas reach into the sky, and the Censors' Palace—with its dome and massive colonnades—looks out over the Great Market and the entrance to the Undercity.

For the most part living above ground, the human majority resents the ever-dominant dwarves and fears the rise of Censor Voller and the mutterings of prophecy will pull the Canton into a war only the Undercity desires. Many put their faith in Censor Massaro to uphold traditional human interests, but a quasi-legal group called

CANTON OF MELANA



Symbol: A white upper field, red stripe, and black lower field with three gold stars

Rulers: Censor and Lord Smith Seppo Voller (LG male dwarf fighter 14) and Censor Jacopo Massaro (CG male human bard 12)

Important Personages: Warren Guildmaster, Archking Vinzlo (LE male kobold); Mustering Captain Roleto Tijinesto (LN male human); Lady Coiner and Treasurer Perroneta Ruppen (LN female dwarf); Lord Mason Hudrick Maer (NG male dwarf); Ferryman Udo Veltric (NE male human)

Population: 300,000 (190,000 humans, 95,000 dwarves, 12,000 kobolds, 400 gearforged)

Capital: Melana, population 39,800 (19,000 human, 11,500 dwarves, 9,000 kobolds, 300 gearforged)

Cities: Brescia, population 12,000; Schio, population 7,500

Town: Ferriero, population 2,600; Tolmezo, population 1,500

Castles: Atranto, Spindletop

Great Gods: Volund (patron), Charun, Mavros, Ninkash, Rava

Trade Goods: Iron, coal, weapons, armor, oak and yew wood, copper wire, tin goods, silver jewelry, goose down feathers, high quality quills, mercenaries, mutton

the Temperance League secretly pushes for a preemptive attack on the Undercity while publicly preaching tolerance.

The Undercity

Underneath the paved streets of human Melana lie the tunnels and halls of the dwarves. Great mine shafts driven deep into the earth provide the city with iron, copper, coal, and more precious ores. A maze of workshops, forges, living quarters, and mines extends for miles. Recently, the forges and manufacturers of the Undercity turned aside from forging tools, jewelry, or practical goods and focused on crafting weapons, armor, and powerful magical items. These armaments are stored in hidden vaults scattered throughout the underground city until they are needed to retake the Ironcrags.

The Monarchists

The original dwarves of Melana were monarchist outcasts from the democratic Free Cantons of the Ironcrags. Their descendants still cling to the older traditions of lost Nordheim and believe a dwarven king should rule the Ironcrags. This philosophy does not sit well with their free cousins, who view the Melana dwarves as a collection of lucid lunatics, at best. Unlike their Ironcrag cousins, the dwarves of Melana value the contributions of every dwarf, both male and female, in any task where they showed skill. Thus, unlike some of the Free Cantons, the dwarves of Melana do not cloister their women, and female dwarves can take on any role they choose. Melana's warmest relations are with the cantons of Bareicks, Gunnacks, and Nordmansch.

The jubilant dwarves consider the rise of Voller as the fulfillment of prophecy and look to the Lord Smith to lead them back to the Ironcrags. With their monarchist zeal approaching near fanatical levels they see anything, even the humans of Melana, as obstacles. To most of the dwarves of the Undercity, the Canton has but one leader and that is Seppo Voller.

The King's Prophecy

When the deposed King Ruggeson the Golden fled the Free Cantons, he brought along his blind sister, the dwarven oracle Relvina, author of the infamous *Prophecy of the King*. Dismissed by most scholars as the ravings of a grief-stricken woman, this long, rambling text reads as a collection of half-told stories, odd observations, stream-of-consciousness mutterings, and other nonsense. Yet here and there, brief prophetic insights are scattered throughout the text. Long banned by the Censors of Melana, the *Prophecy of the King* exists now only in fragments handed down from fanatical follower to fanatical follower.

Of the 453 known fragments to exist, some of the more famous passages include:

- The lizard dog sits upon the oversized throne, that be the first sign of fulfillment
- In the halls of stone, the castoff leans northward and carries hope in his pouch
- As the hammer's star rises, the city below gathers winter fruit for the spring march

Dwarves are not the only ones who know about the *Prophecy of the King*. Shadow fey agents hoping to disrupt and weaken Zobeck work to not only encourage faith in the prophecy but to actively try to bring about the fulfillment of certain passages. As of yet, few if any in Melana realize the shadow fey move among them.

Silver Crown Tavern

Deep in the bowels of the Undercity sits a tavern where no lamp has ever burned and few humans dare visit. The Silver Crown Tavern is currently a favorite watering hole for dwarven monarchists and their kobold allies. Here, citizens of the Undercity gather to grumble about the latest racial hatred from the humans and to plan for the king's return. The newest fixture of the Silver Crown is the dwarven bard Nikswen (NE female dwarf (shadow fey) bard 4). Her very popular songs in support of Seppo as the "true censor" and denouncing the perversion of culture in the Ironcrags mask her true identity as a magically disguised shadow fey.

DWARVEN KING'S TOMB

Hidden in the hills of central Melana is a tomb th dwarven monarchists claim holds the remains of Ruggeson the Golden, the dwarf who should have ruled all the Ironcrags. Here, Ruggeson's descendant, Lord Seppo Voller, meets with his most loyal followers to consult the spirits, organize, plan, and supervise the campaign to retake the Ironcrags. The humans above and the shadow fey would dearly love to learn the locatio this tomb.

WARREN GUILD KOBOLDS

The kobolds live in a series of warrens and natura discovered by dwarven miners during one of the expansions of the Undercity. The kobolds were q put to work digging in dangerous areas, mucking privies, and hauling ore for the dwarves. For mar decades, the kobolds were treated as little more t animals. Ten years ago, the kobold Vinzlo was ele censor and ushered in a new wave of respect and treatment for the kobolds. Though many still tre them unfairly, kobolds in Melana have risen to g heights, most importantly through their Warren Guild, a loose organization specializing in divers operations such as spying, trap finding or makin providing elite couriers, and even covert assassin upon occasion. After his term as censor, Vinzlo took control of the Warren Guild and was crown archking or king-above-other-kings by his peopl

TOLMEZO AND THE FLOATING ROADS

The bustling town of Tolmezo sits on the edge of the marshes south of Melana. Tolmezo is the first stop on the Floating Roads, a series of wooden causeways attached by steel rings to stone pillars sunk into the swamps. The causeways float and are passable from Tolmezo into Trombei and along Triolo's border in any season or weather. Melana has launched an ambitious project to restore the Floating Roads after decades of decline.

ADVENTURES IN THE CANTON OF MELANA

Adventures in Melana involve the shifting social dynamics, the vital trade routes, and conflicts that change brings.

- Warren Guildmaster Vinzlo hires the PCs to investigate the mysterious death of former censor Cirillo Faliero and determine if one of Seppo Voller's chief aids could have been behind it.
- The PCs look into how secret plans and communications keep finding their way into human hands from the most secure areas of the Undercity, but their inquiries mark them as targets for shadow fey assassins.
- The infamous thief, the Bulete, has stolen the crown from the Dwarven King's Tomb and fled down the Floating Roads. The PCs must pursue and recover the crown before the discovery of the theft disheartens the superstitious monarchists. Matters grow worse when the thief and crown are both captured by the Ladies of the Wreck.

Under the direction of Marsh Warden Sabine Felderol (NG female ranger 4), teams of human and dwarven crafters work their way from one causeway platform to another. Unfortunately, the work goes slowly due to delays from local conditions and native monsters such as hydra, lizardfolk, and the Ladies of the Wreck, a coven of cannibalistic hags.

Other Sites

Brescia, the Iron Redoubt: At the base of the Ironcrags, the fortress city of Brescia sits astride the road to Melana like a high-walled tower. So it should: the dwarves built Brescia as a rearguard against raids from the Ironcrags. Its defenses include 2,000 dwarven infantry and archers ever alert for aggression from the Free Cantons. Brescia also controls Melana's richest iron veins and significant deposits of silver and semi-precious stones. These mines have attracted dwarven miners, and Brescia is growing quickly.

Ferriero: Primarily a trade town with a border castle to the south, Ferriero was once independent. Trade and customs provide much of its money, especially now that patrolling the road falls to (and is paid for by) Melana.

Keep of Atranto: The largest and richest mines of Melana lie within a day's march of this huge and heavily garrisoned keep.

The Scarlet Citadel: Over the border in the Magdar Kingdom lies the castle of Gellert the Gruesome, a notorious warlock who retains a private army. He scrupulously swears fealty to the censors each year and defends the border against the creatures of the White Forest and the war wagons of the Magdar—though sometimes he fights for the Magdar King Stefanos as well, and his loyalty is suspect at best.

Schio, Gate to the North: At the confluence of the Revolo and Templine rivers, Schio directs a small but active waterborne trade from its well-defended castle. Smaller settlements and farms line these rivers, and ship food and simple crafts via barge through Schio out to Triolo and the Middle Sea. Just as important is the wagon trade north to the Magdar Kingdom and Zobeck.

Sinkhole Mine: The scene of Melana's greatest mining disaster, the Sinkhole was once one of the deepest mines ever dug by dwarven hands. Unfortunately, three years ago the bottom dropped out of the mine, literally. The five lowest levels of the mine fell into a huge sinkhole and vanished into the darkness. The mine was quickly shut down, but rumors linger that the sinkhole is bottomless, or leads to another plane or to the other side of the world.

Spindletop: Commanding the approaches to Verrayne, this castle also keeps a wary eye on the Ironcrags.

Friula, City of Secrets

The stone spires of Friula thrust skyward along the shore and cast their shadows over a massive barrier reef. This coast once boasted luxurious private keeps in Old Verrayne and the secluded refuges of great mystic orders. The cataclysm that destroyed Caelmarath shattered virtually all of these save for one. Built around the only surviving monastery, Friula took in exiles and refugees and sent out adventurous souls to explore the ruined coast, haunted keeps, and empty towers to bring their treasures back to the city. Within a decade, Friula housed more books, scrolls, and records than anywhere outside of distant Allain and the Nurian temples of Thoth-Hermes.

Friula's wealth of knowledge attracts scholars, arcanists, and secret-seekers from all corners, and with this success has come great suspicion from its neighbors. A city of exiles and refugees that invites Mharoti arcanists to trade tomes—and allows ships of the Magocracy of Allain safe harbor—cannot help but unnerve Kammae and Trombei. The city's small enclave of elfmarked scholars and even occasional Arbonesse elves is further "proof" of Friula's suspect reputation to other Septimes. Fortunately for the city, an assault by land would require a march through difficult, basilisk-infested hills. Friula's allies and her enemies send spies more often than armies. A center of art and knowledge, Friula constantly balances shifting political tides to maintain its isolation. Aside from lore, the city has built a strong trade in vellum, bounties of rare inks and dyes from the nearby reef, and other tools of the scholar's trade.

Today, the City of Secrets trembles with fear and uncertainty. The Great Library has become dark, its already vast halls now appearing mazelike, endless and twisting. Scholars and visitors vanish or return corrupted by shadows and whispers speak of even darker creatures prowling the stacks. While the bibliotori argue endlessly in committee, the darkness grows.

Government: Primus the Bibliotori

For most of the city's history, a closed cabal of collectors called the bibliotori ruled Friula. They guarded the city's repositories of books and scrolls and competed tirelessly to expand their private collections. This changed three years ago with the rise of Balack Giolan as primus (or first-among-equals). As primus, Giolan vastly expanded the lore gathering of the bibliotori, even forcing bitter rivals to work together for common cause. This has not won the primus many allies, but as long as he continues to bring in lore and artifacts, his power is secure.

No one knows the exact number of bibliotori, but currently 12 members openly administer Friula's government and act as diplomats. Entry into the cabal is by invitation and extended only to those who can substantially add to the members' collections. Despite [redacted] Great Library and often find themselves in conflict with Keeper Lynnean or with Ulsavus the Golden Voice, the bardic master.

NOTABLE RESIDENTS

The city attracts powerful figures interested in arcane lore and world-changing secrets; its natives are often reluctant to share their secrets with newcomers.

Primus Balack Giolan: While still a low-ranking member of the bibliotori, Giolan brokered a deal with Khryga, the leader of the Red Hags of Ghostlight Reef. In return for material support, the hags supply Giolan with artifacts and lore recovered from the reef. In an association where rank depends upon the depth of a member's collection of lore, Giolan's seemingly endless supply of artifacts allowed him to leverage the other bibliotori until they voted him in as primus. The fall of Illyria weighs heavily on Giolan. He rightly fears that Friula will not be able to maintain its independence and isolation if the Dragon Empire continues to take bites out of the Seven Cities. As primus, Giolan works the bibliotori hard to redouble their lore and artifact gathering, hoping something will be found to either trade for his city's neutrality or to magically ensure it. He advocates bringing adventurers to the problems plaguing the Great Library but finds his ideas refused by Keeper Lynnean or blocked politically by his rivals.

Bibliotor Uthan Bianco: The unfortunate Bianco family lives under a curse: one year after the birth of each Bianco child, the demon Yvriss appears, poses a riddle, and vanishes again. Unless the family can answer the riddle, the child belongs to the demon. When Yvriss appeared for his newborn daughter, Uthan could not answer the riddle but instead of taking the child, the demon offered a bargain: the child would be freed if Uthan would serve in her stead. With no other choice, Uthan agreed and now acts as the demon's thrall, secretly corrupting and weakening Friula from within. At the prompting of Yvriss, Uthan pushes to keep all outside interference away from the issues at the library, a position that conflicts with the primus.

[redacted] Charun, god of the underworld and the rivers of the afterlife, honorable guardian of the dead. Sarda Leynar is one of his great priests, though the city's only shrine to Charun is a small cavern down by the docks. The cult keeps to itself and seems uninterested in the scholarly and artistic pursuits of most Friulans.

Lynnean Verdia, Most Learned, Keeper of the Great Library: In the twelfth year of her 20-year term, the keeper is a fierce negotiator, fearless leader, and savvy politician. She is so determined to guard and preserve each and every scrap of knowledge within the library that some have nicknamed her the "Dragon of the Stacks." If only they realized how right they were.

Lynneaverdia, to use her true name, is indeed a dragon. A silver dragon and the egg-child of the Morza of Marea Yiraz Azah, Lynnean was sent by then-Sultana Azrabahir to infiltrate the Great Library in human form as part of the Mharoti's long term plans for conquest of the Seven Cities. Obsessed with knowledge, spells, and obscure lore, she found the Great Library irresistible and claimed the entire collection as her personal hoard. Lynnean considers herself to be independent of the Dragon Empire, not that she bothered to tell anyone in Harkesh about her liberation, and she guards her books, artifacts, and lore fiercely. Despite all her efforts, the recent corruption of the library continues to grow and, as it does, so too does her anxiety and anger.

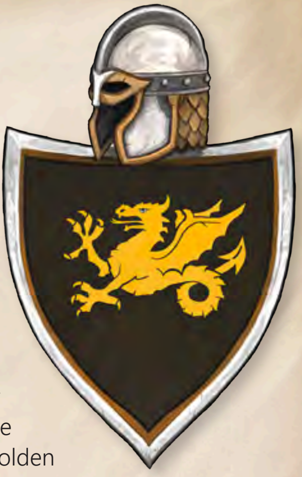
Ulsavus Mentes, the Golden Voice: Ulsavus the Bold, Ulsavus the Invincible . . . the name has a myriad of superlatives, most of them coined by Ulsavus himself. Aging but handsome, Ulsavus remains the most popular player in the amphitheater by deftly mixing fiery political rhetoric with epic ballads and comedic poetry. Ulsavus is also the informal leader of the Friulan Oratorio, a bardic college whose traditions reach back to Old Thorn and elven styles of music. He despises the bibliotori and believes their vast private collections and the workings of government should be open to the public. Ulsavus is not afraid to speak out and use his popularity to raise public ire when the bibliotori cross him.

[redacted]

Adventures in Friula revolve around the pursuit of knowledge and hidden secrets, and preserving the city from more powerful foes.

- A shadow door to the Great Library has been found in the Temple of Charun. and Ferrywoman Leynar needs the PCs to step through it and find the five novices who were dragged away during the night.
- Bibliotor Uthan Bianco hires the PCs to stop the [redacted] the Great Library but this must be done within the stacks and done secretly.
- Suspicious of the Primus' growing power, Ulsavus Mentes hires the PCs to follow a shipment of artifacts from the red hags of ghostlight reef and [redacted]

FRIULA, CITY OF SECRETS



Symbol: Golden basilisk on a black field

Rulers: Primus Balack Giolan (LE male human wizard 10) and the Bibliotori

Important Personages: Most Learned, Keeper of the Great Library Lynnean Verdia (LN female adult silver dragon); Bibliotor Uthan Bianco (CN male human); Ulsavus Mentes, the Golden Voice (CG male human); Ferrywoman Sarda Leynar (N female human)

Population: 133,350 (130,000 humans, 3,000 dwarves, 300 gnomes, 50 elfmarked and elves)

Capital: Friula, population 15,000 (12,000 humans, 3,000 dwarves, 200 gnomes, 50 elfmarked and elves)

City: Feymott, population 13,000

Castle: Starlight Keep

Great Gods: Charun (patron), Hecate, Mavros, Sarastra, Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: Vellum, ink, smoked meat, gemstones, poison, scarlet dye

FRIULAN AMPHITHEATER

Elven song masters crafted this massive amphitheater out of the earth and open to the sky. The cataclysm creating the Goblin Wastes split the amphitheater in two, but simple wooden planks now bridge its gaps.

In addition to performances by the Friulan Oratorio, the amphitheater also hosts scholarly and civic debates, public hearings, and executions. For the worst crimes, the bibliotori turn the convicted to stone through "basilisk justice." The results go to the statuary grounds around the amphitheater.

GREAT LIBRARY OF FRIULA

Many come to Friula for the Great Library, the largest collection of written works in the Seven Cities. The birth, death, and marriage records of the old Valeran empire and some of the earlier magocracies, treatises on alchemy, astrology, demonology, magic, poetry, and theology all crowd its shelves—yet this is not the true wealth of the Great Library.

Long before anyone committed words to vellum or papyrus, the ancient elves recorded their knowledge in song and illusion. Parts of the Great Library float between worlds. Here the ancients created living illusions, spectacular reenactments of pivotal events, and simulacra of great bards reciting the ancient songs. Eldritch creatures guard this dangerous knowledge, and the deeper one delves into this realm, the less likely one is to return.

The Great Library has two primary entrances, only one of which, the Old Thorn Door, is publicly known. As Keeper of the Great Library, Lynnean Verdia knows of the other magical portals allowing entrance to her hoard, though she alone holds the key to the other primary gate, the Valeran Door. Dozens of lesser doors exist, but they are more obscure and frequently more dangerous.

Fulgem Anavot (LE male gnome [shadow thrall] rogue 7/wizard 7) currently holds the key to the Shadow Door, an obscure entrance opening in shadows throughout the city, and he takes particular pleasure in kidnapping the unaware, dragging them through his shadow door, and murdering them. He records their deaths in the Great Library for all time.

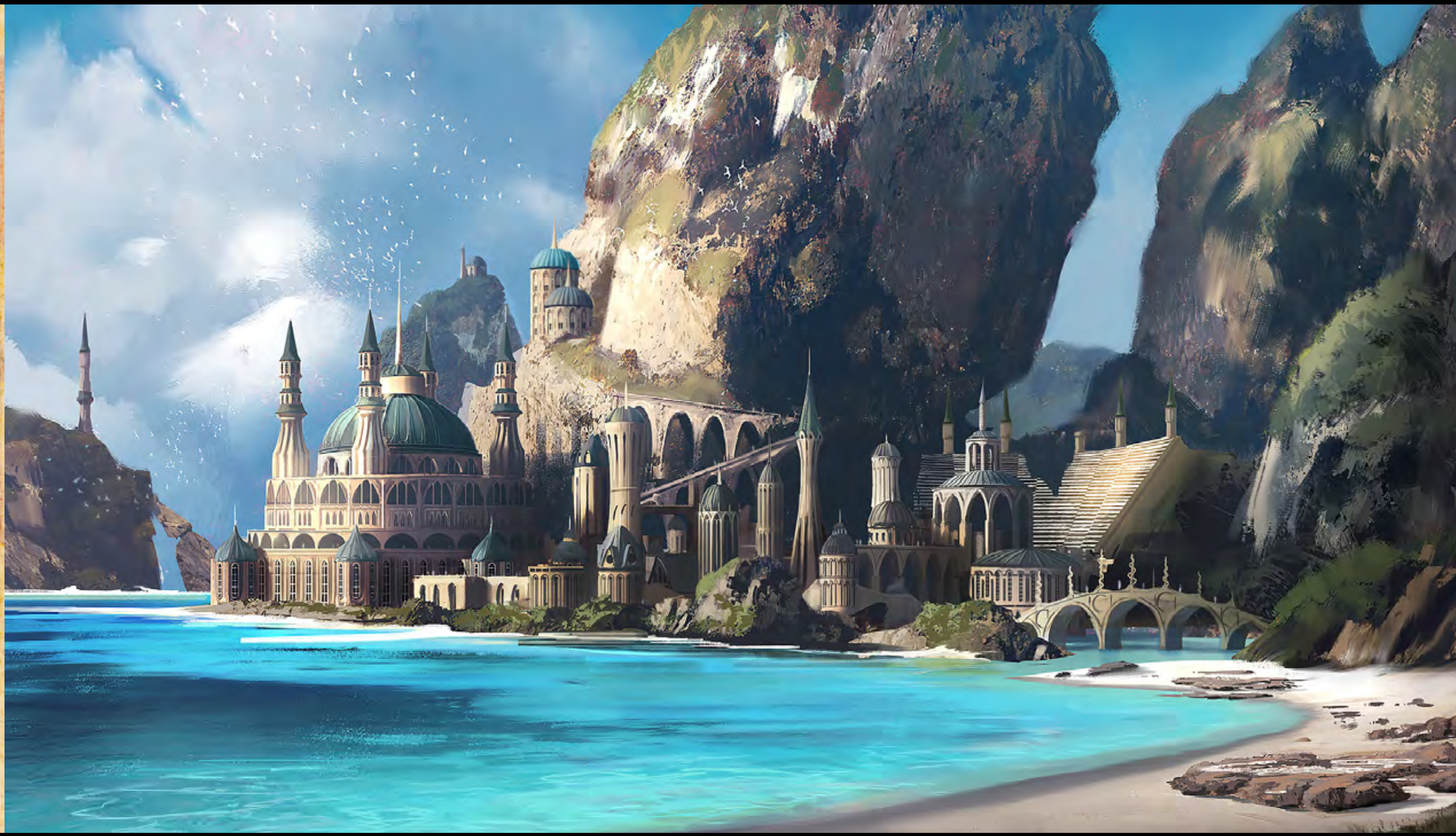
THE SHADOW CORRUPTION

Two years ago, the infamous Stross Family Library in Zobeck returned to that city after being cast into the Plane of Shadows. At least, most of it returned. A shadow of the Stross Library drifted in the currents between darkness and light until it finally latched onto a similar extra-dimensional space: the Great Library of Friula. The two libraries merged into a pocket plane of endless rows and stacks of books. Caught unawares, the shadow doorman Fulgem Anavot succumbed to the darkness and became a shadow thrall and mouthpiece for the strange intelligence behind the ever-spreading corruption.

At first, the change seemed a wish made manifest. Keeper Lynnean discovered tomes unheard of or believed lost forever: vril manuals of ancient Ankeshel, Caelmarath spellbooks, and even stone tablets of the Southland Titans. Soon though, she began finding books that never existed or perhaps only existed in dreams such as *The Journal of the Master of Demon Mountain*, *Confessions of Baba Yaga*, or *The Chartbook of the Lost Fleet of Roshgazi*. Then came the deaths.

Slowly, but with ever growing frequency, scholars and visitors to the Great Library vanished only to be found days later, their personalities permanently despondent (see "Shadow Corruption" in Appendix). Soon only bodies were found, their forms eaten away by patches of inky blackness. The keeper closed all but the most public areas of the library, sending in only trusted agents to determine the problem. Most never returned. Frantic and enraged by the violation of her hoard, Keeper Lynnean fights a daily battle against the shadows, desperate to prevent her precious lore from falling further into darkness.

The library is now much larger than before, too large to be contained in its physical building, with impossibly



books, prowling shadow thralls, and even fictional creatures torn from the pages and given life. Shadow fey skulk through the library, traveling through a shadow road from the shade of Stross Library to the real one in Zobeck. They intend to spread the corrupting shadows across Friula and, in time, the entire Seven Cities.

Ghostlight Reef

The Ghostlight Reef shimmers incandescently, pulsing gently beneath the waters surrounding Friula. Sailors must navigate a narrow channel to reach the city's quay or brave the tides to approach along the shore. Many are lured to their doom by beautiful kelpies, pulled under by giant squid, or fall victim to the coven of red hags scouring the reef for artifacts in the name of their patron, Blood Mother Margase. Sailors call it the Ghostlight Reef, but the tenders of the reef know it by a more ancient name, Tholeachrus.

For centuries, elves and humans alike made sacrifices to the reef, adding blood and bone to its ancient structure. The reef extends deep into the earth. Some say it touches

Sailors' tales aside, reef-tenders harvest materials for dream coral, a powerful hallucinogenic drug, and ebonsrib, a highly poisonous squid-ink. When properly prepared, ebonsrib produces an indelible, deep-black ink valued in glyph and ink magic.

Other Sites

Feymott: The second city of Friula sits on a small hill on the plains stretching up to its strikingly quiet border with Verrayne. The city is far more approachable than the capital. Its wealth comes from simple grains, orchards, and crops of flax, oats, and rye. Feymott holds a Friulan prison for lunatics and spies, the House of Green Tiles.

Starlight Keep: Home to astronomers, summoners, and active mages who might discomfit the scholars of Friula, Starlight Keep holds the elite and the wise. Its grounds are forbidden to most, and the garrison here has repelled several Valeran attacks with arcane fire.

Republic of Trombei

The walled city of Trombei sits coiled like a serpent at the conjunction of the three major highways to Valera, Triolo, and Melana and controls all traffic moving north or south through the Seven Cities. Flanked on either side by impassable marshes, Trombei has leveraged its strategic location and the bounty of its fertile farms to become an economic juggernaut—and a military power, based on the strength of its cavalry. Graft and corruption increasingly sap the nation's strength, and growing discontent over the disease striking their precious herds threatens the foundation of the Republic.

GOVERNMENT: THE COMMUNE

Trombei is a republic ruled by the Commune, a body composed of representatives (*compassi*) from all 24 guilds, with 10 additional seats for landholders. The Commune elects a First Speaker to serve as the city's chief administrator.

Current First Speaker Fallani Vil (LN female human fighter 3/rogue 2) is both the daughter and the niece of previous first speakers. After holding onto her position for over 10 years, Fallani is perfectly at home in the bare-knuckle world of Trombeian politics and uses her vast trove of incriminating or embarrassing information on her rivals to keep her government unified despite the ongoing tension between the wealthy and the poor. Though confident of her ability to manage the various factions, the appearance of the black strangles among the herds threatens to undo all she has accomplished.

The first speaker appoints the field marshal and master of horse, Trombei's most prominent military posts. Since the untimely death of Triadano Gardano, the youthful and fiery General Alessandra Stefano has become master of horse much to the consternation of the other members of the military. This especially includes the current field marshal, Ursli Waldbeck. Once a free company captain, the dwarf grew so influential the city had little choice but to offer him the post. As part of his long-term plans for power in Trombei, Waldbeck wanted the title of master of horse given to his own protégé Matteo Moretti.

Horses of Trombei

The cavalry of Trombei depends on the quality of their horses: large, powerful, highly specialized animals bred to carry a full load of armor and rider and trained to crush foes underfoot. The two most important bloodlines are the black baccanera and the roan barbata lines, both prized and entirely the possessions of the state. Their horses are intelligent and well trained, and their speed makes it possible for them to defend multiple borders without exhausting themselves. General Stefano is rightfully proud of these mounted legions.

Private breeders can buy the rights to breed these lines, and Trombei commonly loans trained horses to mercenaries, but taking any of Trombei's black and roan heavy cavalry over the border earns a death sentence. A third bloodline, the Valeran whitemane, is never privately bred and reserved for the exclusive use of Trombei's officers.

Black Strangles

Two years ago, a virulent and stubborn disease called the black strangles first appeared among the horses of Trombei. Spread from the bite of another horse, the early stages of the disease presents with blackened hooves spreading lines of infection up the legs. This is followed by fever and elongation of the teeth. The middle stage features rotting abscesses in the skin around the neck and flanks. The final stage includes bleeding lungs, increased breathing difficulty, and finally death.

Though spells such as *lesser restoration* can eradicate the black strangles, there are not enough clerics to treat the thousands of horses in the Trombei herds. Despite this, Speaker Vil spends a large portion of the Republic's treasury on a cadre of priests of Ceres to combat the disease. Recently, the dust goblin druid Valibar Fetch has gained great fame by selling an alchemical cure of his devising called *Roggsothof's Balm*. Brewed from orange mushrooms scraped off a Dread Walker, the balm has a 50% chance of either curing the rotting abscesses of the black strangles (thereby keeping the disease at that stage) or killing the horse outright.

Notable Residents

The people of Trombei are mocked by their neighbors as large, well fed, and loud. They are definitely larger and bolder than the quiet Friulans or the polite Valerans.

Alkman the Fat: Trombei's most recognizable resident, the flamboyantly obese General Alkman Sar once served as a highly regarded cavalry officer. Now, only a gilded and well-armored cart drawn by draft horses can carry his grossly overweight body. His youthful exploits make him widely beloved, and his jolly exterior and naive charm lead many to accept and tolerate him as a simple-minded soldier basking in past glories.

It's all an act, of course. The brilliant strategic mind lurking beneath the simpleton's mask commands Trombei's growing network of diplomats, spies, and assassins. Alkman's charge is the continued expansion of Trombei's influence through both military and nonmilitary means. A genuine patriot, he perfectly matches an unshakeable belief in Trombei's destiny as the most powerful of the Seven Cities with a realistic and practical understanding of how to achieve that ambition by sword and by craft.

Valibar Fetch: A dust goblin from the Wasted West, Valibar Fetch has become a local celebrity with his strange medicinal tonics. He operates from the confines of Trombei's Alchemists' Guild, who take a cut of his earnings in exchange for protection from the occasional mishap caused by the goblin's unorthodox concoctions.

THE BRAWLS

Docks line each side of the Arnesse River as it passes through the heart of Trombei. Those looking for peace and quiet should stay away since the Brawls are home to every form of vice money can buy.

The Golden Horn Ale House, built over the water on a disused pier, houses the powerful Brewers' Guild. Of all guildhalls in Trombei, none have proven more open to the presence of dwarves than the brewers, and many dwarves travel to Trombei to partake of the brewers' hospitality. Due partly to dwarven influence, the brewers proudly honor the goddess Ninkash as their patron. The guild jealously guards its recipes and techniques, some of which produce magical effects.

The docks also host a small temple of Mavros, where the relic known as the *Hand of St. Ulvert* is kept. Brawlers and sailors alike pray to it for luck, to "guide their fists" or "guide their ship."

CERES-OF-THE-HARVEST

Most of Trombei's citizens revere Ceres-of-the-Harvest as the goddess of the fields, the flocks, and all that brings life. Festivals at the solstices and harvest time celebrate her bounty with burnt straw effigies as symbolic sacrifices. Merchants and bankers revere her as Ceres-in-Gold, portraying her as a noblewoman dressed in cloth-of-gold.

Not all of Trombei's people share equally in the growing affluence, however. Many farmers and laborers see little profit from the region's abundance; the grain goes to the army and the best fodder to cavalry horses. In their frustration, they consider the gilded Ceres a symbol of runaway opulence and view the black strangles as punishment for greed and avarice. Ceres's cult has become both a refuge for the discontented and a cauldron concentrating the people's growing unrest.

A few follow Ceres Vindicator, clothed in black and her arms entwined with striking adders. Bearing poisoned sickles and striking at night, the Reapers destroy property and attack landowners, merchants on the highway, and even government officials.

Until recently, the Commune considered the Reapers a nuisance, but their attacks grow increasingly bold, and their influence is spreading to more and more sympathizers. Some say the Reapers have even infiltrated the city guard.

REPUBLIC OF TROMBEI

SYMBOL: Three golden stalks of wheat against a green field

RULERS: First Speaker Fallani Vil (LN female human bard 11) and the 34 representatives of the Commune

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: General and Master of Horse Alessandra Stefano (NG female human); Field Marshal Ursli Waldbeck (N male dwarf); General Alkman Sar (NE male human); High Harvester Jana Waltin of Trombei (NG female human); Captain Matteo Moretti (CN male human); Valibar Fetch (N male dust goblin)

POPULATION: 1,611,000 (1,600,000 humans, 6,000 dwarves, 5,000 centaurs)

CAPITAL: Trombei, population 66,000 (59,000 humans, 3,000 dwarves, 2,500 centaurs, 1,000 other)

CITIES: Messori Harbor, population 43,000; Carpere, population 18,000

TOWNS: The Sticks, population 2,700; Ponteretto, population 800

CASTLES: Boresti, The Old Hold, Tuono

GREAT GODS: Ceres (patron), Baccholon, Charun, Mavros, Ninkash

TRADE GOODS: Grain, bread, beer, finance/banking, horses and other livestock

BROKEN REEDS

To the north of Trombei lie the marshlands called the Broken Reeds, after an ancient legend of gods trampling this region into the sea. Fed by the Arnesse River from the south, the shallow waterways of the marshes are a maze of drifting reed islands that easily confuse and trap unwary travelers. Home to scattered tribes of grippli, lizardfolk, and swamp creatures, the marshes also hide the ruins of many ancient manor houses and the remnants of even older civilizations. One of these, the Wreck, currently provides shelter for a coven of hags that preys upon travelers between Trombei and Melana.

CARPERE, CITY OF HORSES

Controlling the southern end of the highway before it enters Valeran territory; the large city of Carpere serves as a customs stop for caravans headed into or out of Trombei. Several companies of mercenary centaurs, descendants of the Valeran Rhoetian Guard, patrol the border to root out bandits and discourage smugglers. Carpere is also the site of the tremendous Trombei Horse Fair held each year at Last Leaf, where the trades are quick and fortunes are made and lost. Nothing is too exotic, from a fey walker to a sleipnir. The highlight of the social calendar, the horse fair of Trombei is a huge event spanning 10 days in Last Leaf, and involving tens of thousands of horses, grooms, and buyers.

The centaurs are headquartered in an immens fortress south of the city they call the Old Hold. humans have taken to calling it the Stable. Stran since the appearance of the black strangles, the of Trombei have closed the gates of the Old Hol away visitors with words and arrows. Those cen continue to patrol stay far away from other trav offering no explanation for their odd behavior.

Other Sites

Castle Boresti: Controlling the only land r Triolo, Boresti also serves as a naval arsenal wh Trombei fleet keeps Triolan corsairs and smug check. Its commander is Admiral-General Pav the descendant of its founder.

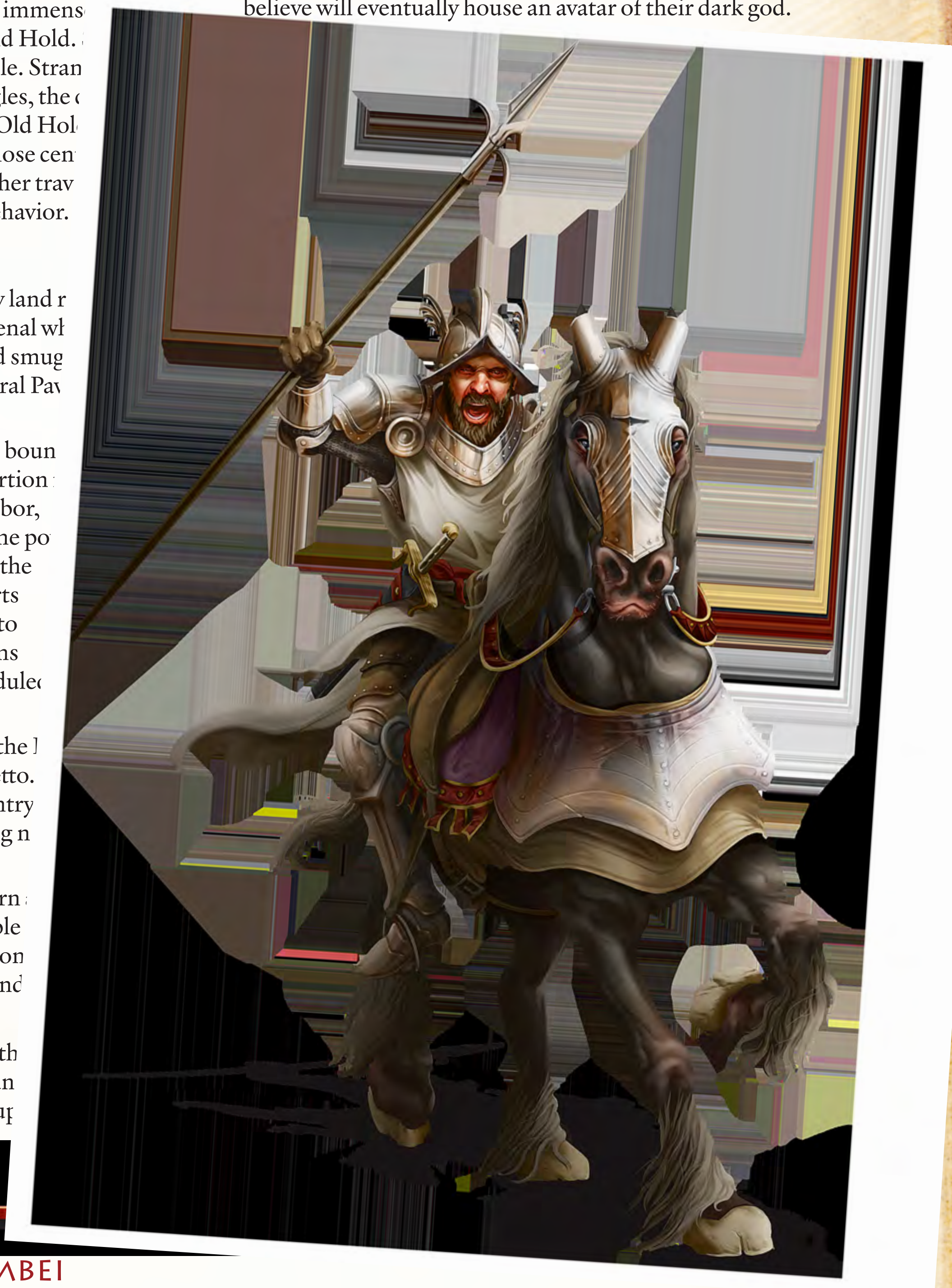
Messori Harbor: Most of Trombei's boun along the highways, but a significant portion down the Arnesse River to Messori Harbor, Trombei's only deep-water port. Here the po of the bankers and farmers gives way to the captains of shipping. A small navy escorts grain shipments to the shores of Triolo to feed its Illyrian refugees, and the captains wisely overlook the occasional "unschedule of grain to Triolo's roving corsairs.

Ponteretto: West of the ruins called the of Glory lies the small village of Ponteretto. villagers take pride in their role as the entry heartland of the Seven Cities; everything n "not really Septime."

Tuono Keep: Commanding the western plains, Tuono Keep is an enormous stable much of Trombei's cavalry. It is a common ground against Valera, and the year-round firebrand General Alessandra Stefano.

The Wreck: One of the great ruins in th this crumbling former castle lists at a dan a sunken ship. Currently this site is occup

of the Wreck, a coven of cannibalistic hags worshipping the Hunger. They use the flesh and bones of their victims in the construction of a massive corpse golem, which they believe will eventually house an avatar of their dark god.



Adventures in Trombei

Adventures in Trombei touch on the inhabitants' unshakeable faith in Trombian destiny and deal with the increasing rage over inequity and injustice.

- General Stefano has heard tell of a disease on the Rothenian Plain similar to the black strangles and hires the PCs to travel to the centaur tribes there and obtain a cure.
- Hired by the Alchemists' Guild, the PCs must thwart dust goblin assassins attempting to kill Valibar Fetch for stealing a piece of their living god.
- First Speaker Vil hires the PCs to stop Mharoti agents and their Reapers allies, who are poisoning the horses of the Trombei Cavalry and disguising it as the plague.

Republic of Triolo

The corsairs of Triolo are notorious from the White Sea to the great Western Ocean as fearless raiders who strike any shipping other than their own, seize cargoes of all kinds, and ransom captives from every nation. The richness of Triolo's spice and glass trade goes far, as does its clever diplomacy, but the city seems to exist on a precariously balanced stew of lawlessness, infernal bargains, and vast fortunes pledged and squandered. Fortunately, its people are loyal, proud, and hard working. A preeminent sea power, the wealth brought in by Triolo's fleets ought to ensure security—but that was before Illyria fell to the Mharoti Empire.

Rocked to its core by the occupation of Illyria, Triolo suddenly finds itself on the front line of a war most fooled themselves into believing was still far away. Now past the fear-fueled conflicts between citizens and refugees, Triolo stands mostly united behind a singular goal: to drive the Mharoti back.

GOVERNMENT: CAPTAINS OF THE FLEET

Triolo has a complex government of two dozen merchant families called the Golden Council, and a far-flung network of ambassadors and spies in 50 or more cities. It is better informed than any other state besides Kammae. However, the hands and minds of Triolan policy are governed by the duke-admirals, admirals, captains, and commanders of her fleets, in descending order.

The First Duke-Admiral is elected by the council and holds the position for life or until he or she abdicates, typically at age 60 or 70. Cadua, the first minotaur to serve in this position, is a polarizing figure within the city of Triolo even after 18 years of service. Most revere him for his stance against the Mharoti and consider him a promising sign of Kyprion's and Triolo's joint destiny. Others feel sure his steerage has brought the Republic to the edge of ruin.

First Duke-Admiral Cadua, the Golden Horn

After an impetuous youth and a naval disaster, Captain Cadua left Triolo to find greater wisdom. He did, for a terrible price. Visiting oracles across the length and breadth of the land, he sacrificed parts of himself (a horn, an eye, and a hand) to gain insight. He returned to Triolo, burning with the faith of Mavros and leading a score of ships. The people of Triolo, even his detractors, acclaim him as the first and greatest of the minotaurs, and they acknowledge his potential to lead his people into the highest ranks of Triolo's navy and society. As a minotaur he feels great conflict over the invasion of Kyprion, but he is wise enough to know if he sends troops to the minotaurs, the dragons will attack Triolo.

When Illyria fell, Cadua took command as never before, throwing open Triolo's gates to accept the flood of refugees and then channeling their hated, fear, and depression into a reborn resolve to fight. He truly believes Mavros wills them to retake Illyria, and he will answer his god's call by dragging Triolo onto a war footing as never before.

Duke-Admiral Andreos Galatino

At 88 summers, Duke-Admiral Andreos Galantino is dying. He stepped down from the role of First Duke-Admiral gladly, allowing Cadua to handle the control of the navy while he keeps spies on every street and diviners constantly seeking threats to the republic. He has a keen ear for flattery and does not tolerate it, a trait that has endeared him to his people and frustrated diplomats for decades.

Though he spends most of his time in bed, Galantino's primary responsibility remains Triolo's maritime security—building ships and finding crews for them—which he handles through a network of assistants and messengers. He still believes the Seven Cities will inevitably unify, and he seeks every means of force and cunning to ensure Triolo leads that unification. He also spends much time with his nephew, the Commodore Piedros Galantino, introducing him to the many people who make up the net holding the Republic together. At 40 years of age, Piedros is his uncle's eyes and ears—and perhaps guiding his hand more and more often.

Commander Raniero Daliato

Charged with leading Triolo's land forces, Commander Daliato's role has increased dramatically since the fall of Illyria. With the ranks of Triolo's army swelled by surviving Illyrian forces and increasing numbers of fighters from the other Septime states, Daliato trains his soldiers hard. He knows he cannot match the Mharoti numbers, but he can try to make up for it with training, skill, and determination. Daliato also informally heads up Triolo's arcane forces, providing scrying and magical cover for the most important and dangerous missions.

A widower recently remarried, Commander Daliato has a reputation as a hard man who pushes himself to exhaustion. He has encouraged many small mercenary companies to serve Triolo on special missions.

Drumbeats of War

As never before, Triolo prepares for war. First Duke-Admiral Cadua drives his nation with inspiring words and burning faith. Today, Triolan warships dominate the Middle Sea, but Cadua knows the Mharoti Empire can always build more ships, and if they do not already have a new fleet, they will have it very soon.

He needs the alliance under negotiation in Kammae to expand to include the other Septime states. Only together can they prevail over the Dragon Empire. But they must do it soon, before the empire has a chance to recover.

Seeing the way the Septime states are aligning, Cadua believes Mavros and Nethus are in accord. However, he privately worries about the sea god's return. Nethus is enormously popular among the Triolan sailors, and the First Duke-Admiral fears if too many turn away from Mavros, Triolo will fall from the war god's favor.

Triolo City and Harbor

Home to more than 100,000 people, Triolo is the heart of a web of sea routes and trading relationships extending from Bemmea in the north to Harkesh and Nuria Natal in the south and east. Its harbor front is among the most cosmopolitan and outrageous length of flagstones anywhere.

Eager to do anything to help the cause of freeing their home, displaced Illyrians have thrown themselves into the ranks of the army, navy, and labor pools of the shipbuilding guilds. The same cannot be said for the Illyrian nobles. Some dedicate themselves to the restoration of their home. Others, though, wallow in their depression or ruthlessly try to carve out a place for "nobles" in a Republic dominated by naval officers.

The Sphinx

Outside the harbor of Triolo lies the large fortified island called the Sphinx, for a supposedly leonine set of features on its southern end. Double-headed eagles nest there, and laborers work to build a new imposing Temple to Nethus on the grounds where the god's old shrine once stood. The major trade fair of Triolo, the Fleet Fair, is held on the Sphinx each year in the month of Thunders. Attendance is 10,000 visitors or more from Raguza, the Magdar Kingdom, Zobeck, the Free Cantons, Morgau, Kyprion, and the Seven Cities.

Spada Quays

The quays are the place to see and be seen, to duel over a share of treasure, to whore and gamble and parade the immense plunder of a rich haul. It's the city's showplace and entertainment center. The law is especially lax for recently arrived crews with gold to spend. Dueling is permitted, and the taverns sell anything and everything.

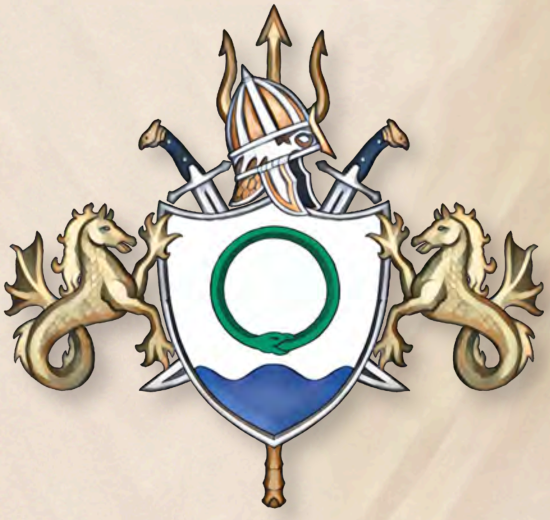
Minotaur Quarter

The minotaurs of Triolo keep to themselves. Though considered lucky by humans, the minotaurs dislike fraternizing with the worst of Triolo's corsairs, the drunken, the violent, the drug-riddled, and the corrupted.

Their quarter of the city maintains its own laws and guards, and these lean heavily on the removal of hands, feet, or fingers as punishment. The notoriously twisting streets quickly confuse most visitors, though the minotaurs claim the pattern is perfectly obvious. Minotaur children charge a small fee to lost visitors to lead them back out.

The invasion of Kyprion by the Mharoti Empire caused great turmoil among the Triolan minotaurs. Some have already left to join their brethren in defense of their island. Others hold support marches urging First Duke-Admiral Cadua to send aid, troops, and ships to Queen Kitane. A

MARITIME REPUBLIC OF TRIOLO



Symbol: A green sea serpent biting its tail, top of field silver, bottom scalloped and blue

Ruler: First Duke-Admiral Cadua, the Golden Horn (NG male minotaur fighter 7/cleric 15 [Rava])

Important Personages: Commander Raniero Daliato (NG male human); "Retired" Duke-Admiral Andreos Galantino (N male human); Counselor of the Morreg, Amba Werabu (LN female human); Eye of Rava Alkestis (LG female human); Lady Melisande, a famous courtesan (N female human); Commodore Piedros Galantino (N male human)

Vassals: Queen Kitane of Kyprion (LG female minotaur cleric 11 [Hecate]); Duke of Raguza Legorio the IV (CE male human wizard 13); Duchess Biljana (NE female human sorcerer 8)

Population: 2,199,900 (2,070,000 humans, 110,000 minotaurs, 16,000 kobolds, 3,900 gnomes)

Capital: Triolo, population 114,000, (93,000 human, 18,000 minotaur, 1,200 kobolds, 800 gearforged)

City: Salba, population 8,000

Town: Archae, population 3,000

Vassal City: Raguza, population 58,000

Castles: Crow's Landing, Stenchhold, Castelo Scovar

Great Gods: Mavros (patron), Ceres, Charun, Nethus, Rava

Trade Goods: Glass, rope, fish in oil, sailcloth, spices from the east, crossbows, cast bronze few of these demonstrations end in bloodshed between the minotaurs and humans demanding the fleets protect Triolo first before some distant shore.

ILLYRIAN QUARTER

Huddled just outside of Triolo's walls, the Illyrian Quarter consists of an odd mixture of permanent and semi-permanent homes, shops, and buildings. The area began as a sprawling tent-city populated by refugees streaming over the border from Illyria. Over the past seven years, many of the Illyrians settled within Triolo, but some refuse to surrender their identity as Illyrians. These hard-liners have turned the refugee camp into a city district. The layout of the streets and even the architecture has decidedly Illyrian features. Though nominally ruled by the laws of Triolo, the quarter supplies its own guards who report to the Exiled Council, an assembly of the highest-ranking nobility to survive the invasion. Currently, the nobles wrangle and plot to see which them should become the new Duke or Duchess of Illyria.

STEWS OF TRIOLO

The city treats its scholar-courtesans and artisans well; both live in a single district, called variously the Sewing Quarter, the Scholar's Quarter, or the Stews. The professionals here cater to the needs of everyone, from captains to their crew. Its courtesans, mapmakers, diviners, and accountants are all dear friends of both corsairs and legitimate merchants. The most famous of them all, linked with admirals going back almost 20 years, is Lady Melisande, a scholar-courtesan who has schemed for Triolo in all the Seven Cities.

RAGUZA, CITY OF PIRATES

Under the watchful eye of the towering sea titan standing in the harbor, the former corsair haven of Raguza rings with the sound of shipbuilding hammers, the shouts of drilling soldiers training, and the screeches of returning hippogriff scouts. Half of the Triolan fleet is stationed here with more under construction in slips laid out along the beach. The same location that allows pirates easy access to merchant vessels now allows Raguzan privateers, holding Triolan letters of marque, to raid Mharoti shipping. The so-called Black Flag Accords signed by the Admiralty and the Duke of Raguza granted pardon to any pirate willing to become a privateer. Those who refused are no longer allowed in Raguza and have relocated their piratical activities to a hidden cove near the ruins of Coron.

Raguza's ruler is Duke Legorio the IV, the scion of a thoroughly corrupt family. Along with his wife, the sorceress Biljana, the vile pair govern their city according to their own (and certain other powers') designs. The Duke of Raguza owes fealty to the maritime Republic, and under the Black Flag Accords he must accede to the requests of the local Republic representative, Admiral Lucca Agnone (CG male human fighter 4/rogue 5). The

PRIVATEERS AND LETTERS OF MARQUE

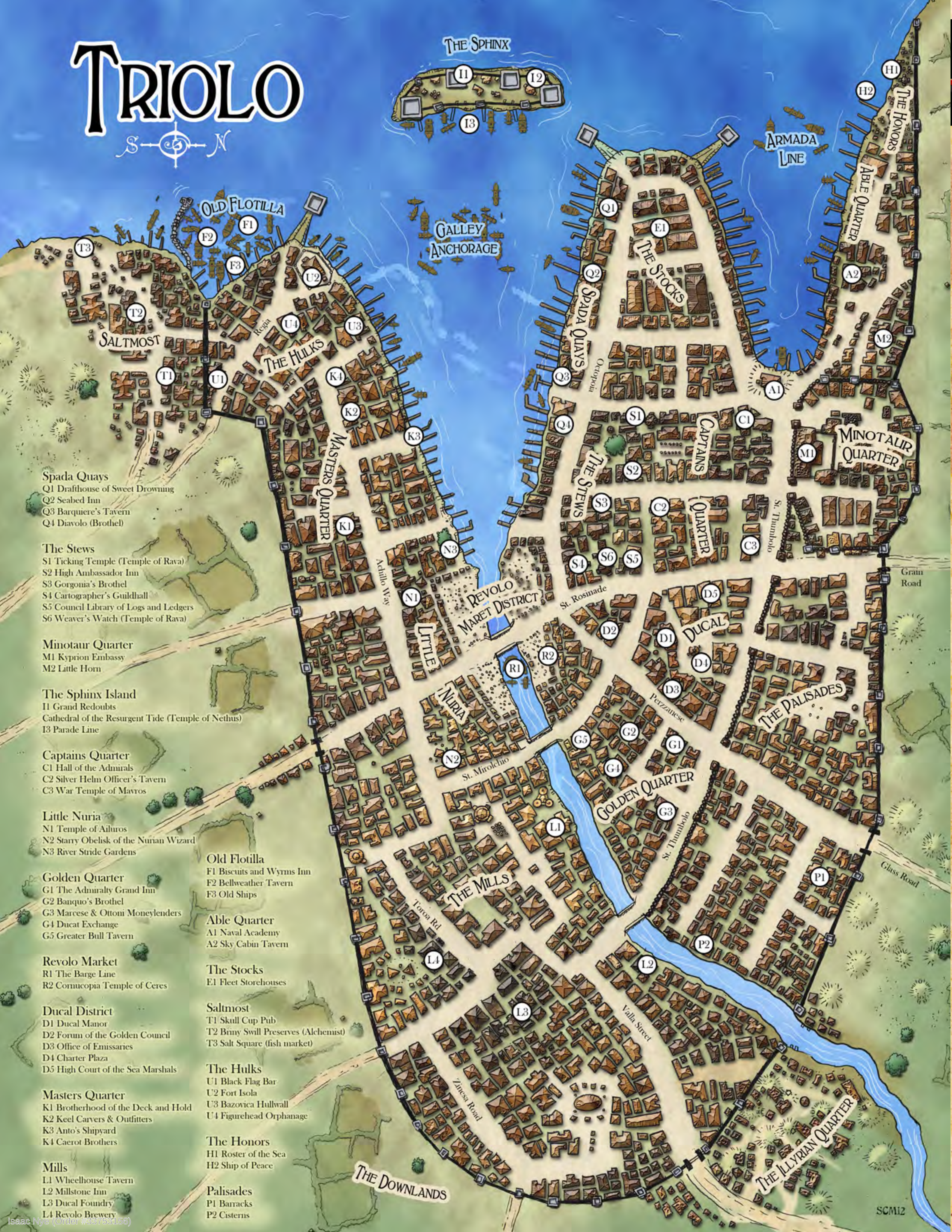
Privateers are mercenary sailors who attack and seize ships of a particular nationality. Essentially sanctioned pirates, these sailors can engage in what would otherwise be illegal activities such as waylaying ships at sea, plundering their cargos, and killing enemy crews.

The captains of privateer crews hold a special document, called a letter of marque, which authorizes them to attack ships of specific nations and, theoretically, offers some legal protection. In practice, any privateer captured by an enemy is treated as a pirate rather than a prisoner of war. Captains with letters of marque can also sell stolen cargo in friendly ports without fear of accusations of theft.

Officially, letters of marque are handed out after carefully reviewing an applicant but a pouch containing 500 gp is the current going rate.

TRIOLAN ARMADAS

Trade from Triolo is funded, guarded, and secured by the state, with profits split among cartels of nobles and the duke. These great merchant armadas, called "galleys," include a dozen or two dozen ships traveling together. The most common such galleys sail to the most profitable destinations; the Triolan ships sail in the Nurian Galley and the Capleon Galley (which also includes Cirdass) three times a year, twice a year in the Achillon, Friulan, Harkesh, and Perzhan Galleys, and once in the Orkasan Galley within the Ruby Sea (which also visits Reth-Saal and Kaa'nesh). The Barsellan Galley sails once a year as well, though in years of bad storms or shipping losses elsewhere it frequently is cancelled. Rarest of all is the Galley of Thorn, which no longer visits Thorn, but does call on Maillon, Bemmea, and Donnermark roughly every third year.


TRIOLO
S
N
THE SPHINX
I1
I2
I3
OLD FLOTILLA
F1
F2
F3
GALLEY ANCHORAGE
ARMADA LINE
H1
H2
THE HONORS
ABLE QUARTER
A1
A2
M2
T3
T2
SALTMOST
T1
U1
U2
U3
U4
Regia
THE HULKS
K1
K2
K3
K4
MASTERS QUARTER
Q1
Q2
Q3
Q4
SPADA QUAYS
Octopoia
E1
THE STOCKS
S1
S2
S3
S4
S5
S6
THE STEWS
C1
C2
C3
CAPTAINS QUARTER
M1
MINOTAUR QUARTER
St. Thumbolo
Grain Road
N1
N2
N3
Achillo Way
LITTLE NURIA
REVOLO MARET DISTRICT
St. Rosinade
R1
R2
D1
D2
D3
D4
D5
DUCAL
Perzzanese
THE PALISADES
G1
G2
G3
G4
G5
GOLDEN QUARTER
St. Mirolchio
L1
L2
L3
L4
THE MILLS
Toroa Rd
St. Thumbolo
P1
P2
Glass Road
Valla Street
Zinesa Road
THE DOWNLANDS
THE ILLYRIAN QUARTER
SCM12
Spada Quays
Q1 Drafthouse of Sweet Drowning
Q2 Seabed Inn
Q3 Barquiere's Tavern
Q4 Diavolo (Brothel)
The Stews
S1 Ticking Temple (Temple of Rava)
S2 High Ambassador Inn
S3 Gorgonia's Brothel
S4 Cartographer's Guildhall
S5 Council Library of Logs and Ledgers
S6 Weaver's Watch (Temple of Rava)
Minotaur Quarter
M1 Kyprion Embassy
M2 Little Horn
The Sphinx Island
I1 Grand Redoubts
Cathedral of the Resurgent Tide (Temple of Nethus)
I3 Parade Line
Captains Quarter
C1 Hall of the Admirals
C2 Silver Helm Officer's Tavern
C3 War Temple of Mavros
Little Nuria
N1 Temple of Ailuros
N2 Starry Obelisk of the Nurian Wizard
N3 River Stride Gardens
Golden Quarter
G1 The Admiralty Grand Inn
G2 Banquo's Brothel
G3 Marcese & Ottoni Moneylenders
G4 Ducat Exchange
G5 Greater Bull Tavern
Revolo Market
R1 The Barge Line
R2 Cornucopia Temple of Ceres
Ducal District
D1 Ducal Manor
D2 Forum of the Golden Council
D3 Office of Emissaries
D4 Charter Plaza
D5 High Court of the Sea Marshals
Masters Quarter
K1 Brotherhood of the Deck and Hold
K2 Keel Carvers & Outfitters
K3 Anto's Shipyard
K4 Caerot Brothers
Mills
L1 Wheelhouse Tavern
L2 Millstone Inn
L3 Ducal Foundry
L4 Revolo Brewery
Old Flotilla
F1 Biscuits and Wyrms Inn
F2 Bellweather Tavern
F3 Old Ships
Able Quarter
A1 Naval Academy
A2 Sky Cabin Tavern
The Stocks
E1 Fleet Storehouses
Saltmost
T1 Skull Cup Pub
T2 Briny Swill Preserves (Alchemist)
T3 Salt Square (fish market)
The Hulks
U1 Black Flag Bar
U2 Fort Isola
U3 Bazovica Hullwall
U4 Figurehead Orphanage
The Honors
H1 Roster of the Sea
H2 Ship of Peace
Palisades
P1 Barracks
P2 Cisterns

duke and the admiral dance around each other, neither willing to make a move against the other while the Mharoti threat hangs overhead.

ILLYRIAN SCOUTS

Mounted on hippogriff or dragon back, the winged Sky Riders of Illyria command their units from above. The sons and daughters of displaced Illyrian nobility, they bond with a mount at a young age, and the pair train to fly and fight together. Those who survived the Mharoti invasion fled to Raguza where they provide invaluable service as scouts, saboteurs, and couriers. Their able commander is Orania Oreste (LG female human paladin 10 [Mavros]), a small but determined woman whose hippogriff, Hunter, is at the front of any aerial charge.

ARCHAE, THE SPIDER'S SHRINE

This small, green island with its marble temple and its close-knit community of priestess-weavers dedicated to Ariadne (Rava) has been the site of a mystery for over five years. Ariadne's oracle Alkestis remains sealed within a crystal sphere just as she was found a half a decade ago. Though as powerful as her sister in Zobeck and able to both see and manipulate the strands of fate, she is nonetheless apparently asleep or magically frozen, and the sphere cannot be broken by any means thus far attempted.

Most believe agents of the Dragon Empire used some manner of artifact on the oracle to deprive Triolo of her advice. Recently, a mage from a distant Southlands kingdom arrived on Archae, drawn, he claims, by prophetic visions. Counselor Amba Werabu (LN female human wizard 12) of the Morreg works to free the oracle using incantations and magic unseen in the Midlands before now.

Pilgrims from Triolo still come in early summer and immediately after the harvest, bearing gifts and praying before the oracle's shrine. Many later tell they dreamed of the oracle and gained valuable council.

RUINS OF CORON AND TURTLE COVE

Once a military island, Coron defended the Gulf of Triolo against the ships of the Mharoti Empire and housed galleys of war, corsairs, and Triolo's mightiest weather mages until Storros the Sea Sage (N ancient male dragon turtle) rose up from the depths and laid waste to the harbor fortress. Many lost their lives in the attack, including Coron's young commander Admiral Lenuzo Desprado.

Today, the ruins of Coron remain untouched, but nearby a smaller, secluded harbor flourishes. Turtle Cove, as it is cheekily named, is home to lack-hearted and diabolical galleys too ashamed to anchor in the line on the Spada Quays. Ruled by former Raguza adviser Padfoot Jaagup (LE male gnome wizard 10), a diabolist once of Niemheim, Turtle Cove is a true pirate haven where the law of the sea, sword, and pirate's code govern all. A host of services can be found here for the active pirate. Other members of the Jaagup clan act as semi-official tax collectors, enforcers, and guards. Driven by a need for blood and sacrifices, the gnome diabolists available for hire make excellent marines and deadly illusionists, drawing Mharoti ships onto rocks, disguising war galleys as fat merchant vessels, and similar tricks.

First Duke-Admiral Cadua knows about Turtle Cove and its location, but as long as the pirate crews burn, pillage, and destroy Mharoti ships and villages, no one from Triolo asks too many questions.

OTHER SITES

CROW'S LANDING: This castle commands the approaches to the city of Triolo at a greater distance than the Sphinx, and it houses messenger birds, wizards, and courier galleys swift as the wind to carry news of every vessel approaching. The landing serves as a popular place to unload unpopular cargoes best not sold in Triolo, including drake eggs, hostages from Capleon, Trombei, or Valera, and dragonkin prisoners. The fortress serves as a frequent site of executions in wartime.

LIVING COLOSSUS: As a sign of Nethus's blessing of the alliance between Kammae and Triolo, a sea titan guards the entrance to Raguza harbor. The titan does not speak and refuses to communicate but acts swiftly against Mharoti vessels and aerial forces. He has already destroyed several raids single-handedly.

SALBA: Once a peaceful fishing village, Salba is now the site of intense work on the new Castelo Scovar, a fortress being built with incredible haste to defend the plains south of Triolo. A Melanese dwarven architect named Gorodin Rottoveno is building defensive tunnels, well-roofed towers resistant to dragonfire, and more, but he is reputed to take extreme shortcuts. His castle is disparagingly

GALLEYS, MERCHANTS, AND COINAGE

Triolo does a great deal of trade to the north, up the Glass Road to Zobeck and beyond. The Maritime Republic takes its fee in the form of mercenaries and in captured Mharoti for use as galley slaves.

As a result, the Triolan gold ducat is a standard coin in a much larger region than one might expect. The Valeran ducat is much debased, and the silver mark or hackgold of the North is rarely found in the Seven Cities.

Rare but valued at double a single gold coin are the orichalcum coins once minted by the elves and before them by the Ankeshelians. These orichalcum coins (abbreviated op) are accepted everywhere but now only minted by the Grand Duchy of Dornig and in some years by the Ironcrag Cantons.

[redacted]

practice of the masons of filling its curtain walls with literal rubbish and anything they can get quickly—in some cases, with materials simply left lying around nearby). Thus far, no Mharoti raids have come to test the defenses.

Stenchhold: The political prison for enemies of the Triolan state is also the fortress holding its border against Trombei. Largely neglected and falling into greater disrepair with each season, it sits on a hill with an excellent view of the Broken Reeds. Soldiers, politicians, and citizens alike consider this place a pestilential backwater and do their best to forget both it and the people sentenced there.

Serene Isle of Kyprion

Since the fall of Kadralhu and Roshgazi to dragon's fire 300 years ago, the Serene Isle of Kyprion has served as the homeland of the minotaurs. In addition to its strategic position, this volcanic island has rich fields of wheat and barley and vast orchards of olives, apples, pears, and nuts.

In exchange for defense, Kyprion owes fealty and allegiance to the Maritime Republic of Triolo, but recent events threaten to unravel this strategic and important alliance. As retaliation for the destruction of their fleet, flights of fire dragons razed the city of Gramvar to charred timbers and ash, and while the minotaurs scrambled to aid their stricken fellow citizens, a large draconic force seized Chamiras, City of Rope. Instead of advancing, however, the dragonkin dug defensive trenches and began fortifying the city using the inhabitants as slave labor. Furious minotaurs hurriedly established their own lines of defense with a no-man's-land in between. While Queen Kitane pleads for aid from her Septime allies and struggles to hold back her furious subjects lest they perish in suicidal attacks, the Serene Isle is anything but serene.

THE QUEEN OF KYPRION

The title of "queen" on Kyprion is largely hollow, though saying so is a sure way to provoke nearby minotaurs to a duel, or worse. As vassals to Triolo, the minotaurs are subjects without a real nation of their own, a fact which rankles most on the island.

Outwardly, Queen Kitane tries to maintain her image as a gentle priestess, kind and merciful to her people, who honors and values the alliance with Triolo. She finds great solace in the military alliance forming between Triolo, Kammae, and Kyprion, especially since they have some signs of support from Nuria Natal. Kitane sees this alliance as her people's best hope.

Privately, however, she seethes over Triolo's refusal to send military aid, and her anger has driven a wedge between herself and her consort, Pinaruti, who has sworn fealty to Triolo. It is clear to everyone the foothold in Kyprion is nothing more than a ploy to draw forces away from Triolo. Should the First Duke-Admiral send his troops, the Dragon Empire will surely descend upon Triolo in force. This realization does little to alleviate the suffering of the people of Chamiras. Deep down, Kitane acknowledges and even agrees with First Duke Cadua's decision but cannot help but feel betrayed and abandoned.

It is all Kitane can do to keep her people from descending into the storm of anger and fury and reverting to the old ways of blood-fueled dunamiphagy (the consuming of an enemy's heart to gain spiritual power). The queen knows she must keep her people from throwing off Triolo's gentle yoke, for doing so would leave Kyprion wide open to the Dragon Empire's wrath.

Vespras, City of Song

A truly great city, the capital boasts wide avenues and well-paved streets, lush foliage, and fragrant groves outside its walls. Wells near the top of the city's main hill send magically raised water cascading down through a series of fountains and channels to the markets and rich houses on the waterfront. Humans and gearforged are welcome, especially those who share a faith with the minotaurs.

[redacted]

The most common adventures in Triolo involve land or sea operations against the Mharoti Empire with a healthy dose of intrigue and dark practices.

- Commander Daliato needs the PCs to sneak across the border into Rumela to rescue a famous Illyrian war hero from a prisoner of war camp near Kruja.
- Cormoran de Sanis, a priest of Mavros, hires

combat divination from the Morreg Grey Seers accompanying Counselor Amba Werabu, but upon their arrival they find the island crawling with elite dragonkin troops.

- With a commission from First Duke-Admiral Cadua, the PCs must infiltrate the high society functions of the exiled Illyrian nobility in Triolo to uncover a traitor who has been poisoning important members

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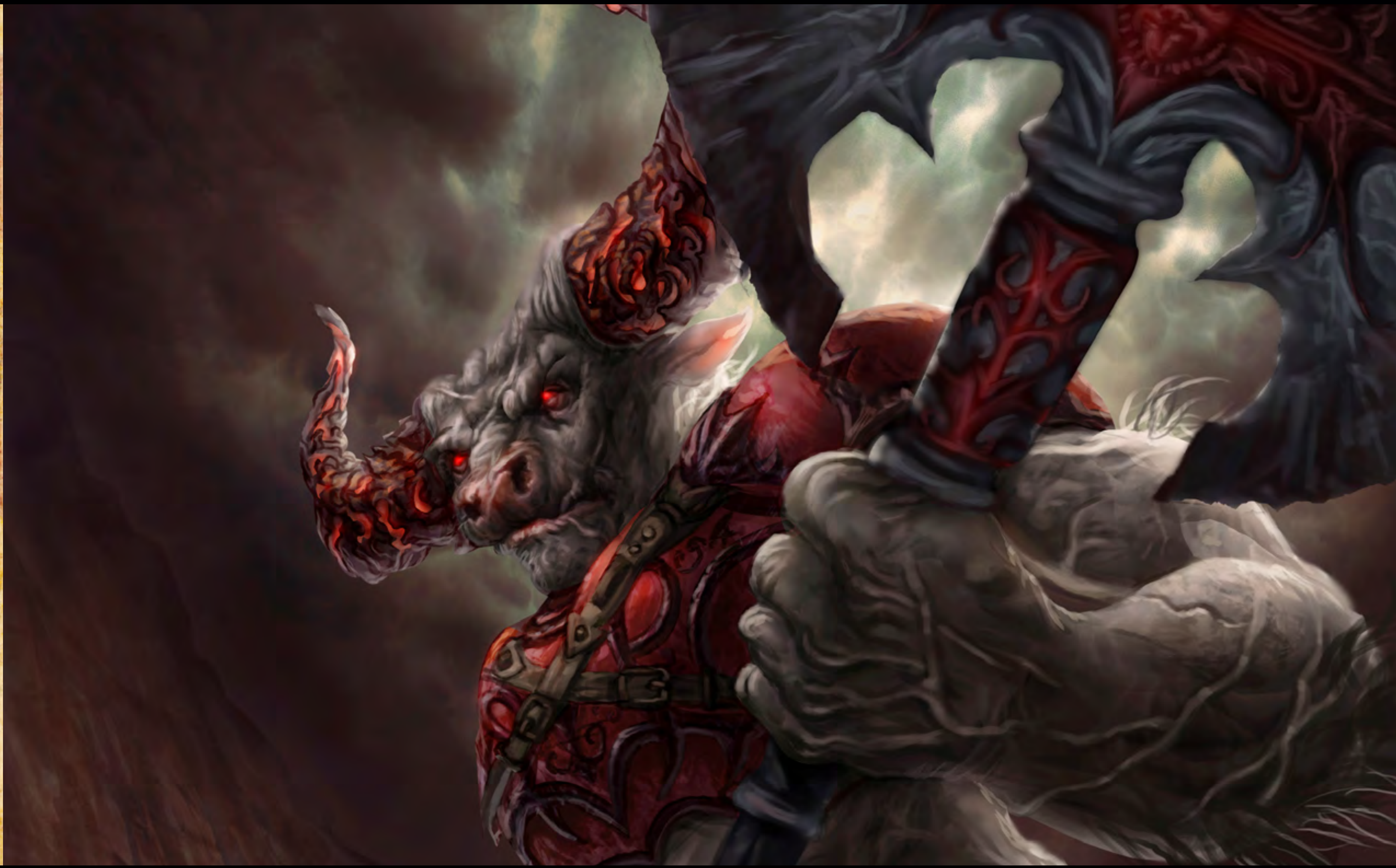

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Queen Kitane and her consort Pinaruti rule from the palace at the top of the city's hill, an enormous structure of colossal stones and heavy pillars in the style of Nuria Natal. The palace stands within the Great Labyrinth and boasts sweeping sea vistas, large inner courtyards, and beautiful music by day.

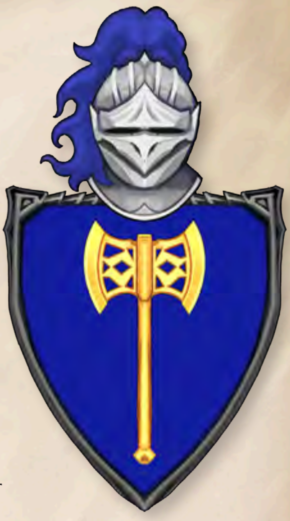
At night, guests hear screams, thrashing, and the sounds of the queen's enemies dying in agony. Rumors say she invites her friends and enemies to sleep in her halls, but only her friends survive the visit. The palace guards—all enormous minotaurs, skilled in magic and combat and fanatically loyal—lend credibility to the whispers.

THE GREAT LABYRINTH

Surrounding and containing the Palace of the Bull, the Great Labyrinth stands as both protection and religion to the minotaurs. Even as far back as Kadralhu and Roshgazi, Much of their arcane and divine magic contains a hint of the labyrinth about them.

The Great Labyrinth has two natures, reflecting the duality of sun and moon. During the daylight, to walk the halls of the maze is to commune with Hecate and the minotaur ancestors of old. At night, however, the labyrinth becomes a maze of death when the traps littering the labyrinth become active and beasts prowl and hunt. Several times a year, the Resheig is held—a special hunt through the labyrinth featuring convicted criminals as prey. The spiritual power of the Great Labyrinth should not be underestimated. Utilizing minotaur magic, clerics of the moon and sea can open portals from hidden locations throughout the Great Labyrinth to nearly any distant locations possessing twisting halls or mazelike qualities. This drains the Great Labyrinth, however, so the queen uses this power infrequently.

SERENE ISLE OF KYPRION



Symbol: A great double-headed ax, gold on a blue field

Rulers: Kitane, Queen of the Labyrinth (LG female minotaur cleric 11 [Hecate]) and her consort, Pinaruti (LG male minotaur paladin 5 [Hecate]), owing fealty to Triolo

Important Personages: Aarush Vedula (LE female adult fire [red] dragon); Ambassador Zaneta (N female human); Horned Governor Yikashata of Chamiras (LN male minotaur); Horned Governor Ulshul of Spintarra (LG female minotaur); Othenio (CN large male cyclops)

Population: 498,000 (301,000 minotaurs, 191,000 humans, 6,000 gearforged)

Capital: Vespras, population 19,500 (10,100 minotaurs, 8,000 humans, 1,400 gearforged)

Cities: Spintarra, population 15,200; Longezza, population 9,600; Chamiras, population 7,000 (plus invading legion)

Great Gods: Hecate (patron), Mavros, Ceres, the Hunter, Rava

Trade Goods: Sailcloth, rope, flax, linen, olive oil, olives, alchemical materials, cotton

THE DANCERS' COURTYARD

A huge amphitheater cut into the city's stone, the courtyard hosts public entertainments, ritual human sacrifices to the gods of Kyprion, and contests of song. Open to all comers, the entertainments are called "dances" but are more properly ritual combats between minotaurs and monsters, trials by combat to resolve disputes, or sometimes displays of skill with visitors. Prisoners of war and criminals make up most of the human sacrifices, though dragonkin and kobolds from Mharoti frequently bleed their lives out in the courtyard. The contests of song are exactly that: attempts to sway Queen Kitane with choral music, a performance by a single gifted singer, or in some cases, petitioners making a plea directly to the queen for mercy, justice, or revenge.

HALL OF THE EAGLE

The presence of Ambassador Zaneta is quiet but firm. Theoretically, as the voice of First Duke-Admiral Cadua, Zaneta can compel the queen's behavior in any number of ways. In practice, the ambassador acts as more of a vizier or counselor. The minotaurs hate the Mharoti passionately, and the ambassador plays on this skillfully. Her reports to the Duke-Admiral are complete and accurate, and her loyalty unshakeable. Sadly, she is also deeply corrupt, and she lines her pockets at Triolo's expense in matters of contracts and naval procurement.

The razing of Gramvar and the foothold the Mharoti Empire has established in Chamiras has strained relations between the ambassador and the Kyprion court. Though Queen Kitane and the various branches of the reigning minotaur family know continued fealty to Triolo is in everyone's best interest, Zaneta has been forced to do some arm twisting to keep the minotaurs under control. After several angry altercations, Zaneta now travels with two bodyguards.

OCCUPIED CHAMIRAS

Once Chamiras produced the finest hempen rope, a staple of the sailor's trade and crucial to the survival of the maritime nations. This hard-working city was known for its great necropolis, called the City of the Honored Dead. That was before the Mharoti established their foothold.

Two months ago, while the majority of the Chamirasi guard rushed to aid their brethren as dragon fire razed Gramvar, a small legion of Mharoti troops made landfall under the cover of magically created fog and *invisibility* spells. Under the command of Aarush Vedula, the legion

THE SULTAN'S FOOTHOLD LEGION

More than enough to pacify a single Kyprion city, this legion could conquer the entire island if unleashed. It may simply be strengthening its hold on Chamiras before doing exactly that.

- 5 fire and earth elementalists
- 50 timarli heavy cavalry
- 100 akinji light cavalry
- 250 dragonkin heavy infantry
- 500 kobold archers
- 200 human and kobold engineers
- 1,000 jambuka levies (humans, gnolls and ogres)

quickly seized the city and began fortifying its position. Four hundred minotaurs were put to death immediately as an object lesson, and the rest provide slave labor for the building efforts.

Today, defensive trenches encircle the city, studded with traps for incoming infantry. The walls of Chamiras grow taller, and the former manor of the governor, called the Palm Palace, is shrouded by scaffolding as it is rebuilt into an imposing fortress. The minotaur citizens are cowed by overwhelming reprisals over the slightest infraction and desperately pray to any god who will listen for rescue—even calling on the Hunter for aid.

A protégé of Lashmaraq Talshah, the Morza of Hariz, Aarush Vedula has no qualms about the suffering of the minotaur people. They are all "jambuka" (literally, "jackals") and unworthy. Convinced her rivals seek to hold her back from glory, she is furious about her explicit orders to hold her position. She takes out her frustrations on former Horned Governor Yikashata, whom she keeps chained in her personal quarters. His howls of agony echo throughout the night.

Ruins of Gramvar, City of the Moon

Razed by flights of fire dragons, Gramvar is now nothing more than blackened ruins, ash, and ghostly screams on the wind. The city once specialized in binding demons and spirits and producing alchemist's fire for the Triolan navy. Now, ghosts haunt the charred remains of buildings and freed demons prowl for anyone foolish enough to venture into the still-smoking ruins. A small detachment of minotaur guards struggles to keep the undead and demonic forces contained within the former borders of the city.

Longezza, City of Weavers

The Longezza weavers are devoted to Rava's weaving aspect and are exclusively women. This city turns out sailcloth, linen, and cotton in staggering quantities. Longezza is also popular among sailing crews as a place to meet wealthy women who might support a sailor crippled in the line of duty. Its hospital is among the best, and "a rest on Longezza" means both a fine destination for a wounded sailor or a permanent home for one retired from the sea.

A large community of gearforged, both weavers and lore keepers, also live here, all women. The community is an ancient one, since the first priestess of Rava learned the secrets of the gearforged and kept them hidden in Longezza for many years. Local legends say her weaving spiders are the spirits of the island's men in new bodies, doing as weavers the work they neglected in their former lives.

Spintarra, City of Fire

Near the abandoned temple of Baal, the Spintarra ironworks and mines have produced wealth for Triolo and Kyprion for as long as the island has been settled. Its people are miners, smelters, smiths, and armorers, creating all the tools of war. The loot of 1,000 expeditions against the dragon empire fills the city's necropolis.

Spintarra is the target of many Mharoti spies, who have aided repeated attempts to land a legion of the heavy edjet troopers and dragonkin under the city wall. Spintarra's defenses are strong but have been tested many times. A cyclops named Othenio successfully serves as both general and champion. He is responsible for training the Ragkar's Ire, a new generation of minotaur heavy infantry dragonslayers.

Other Sites

Chamiras Earthworks: Just out of artillery range from Chamiras, the earthworks are long trenches mirroring those of the Mharoti defenses. Nearly 2,500 minotaur, human, and gearforged troops are stationed there.

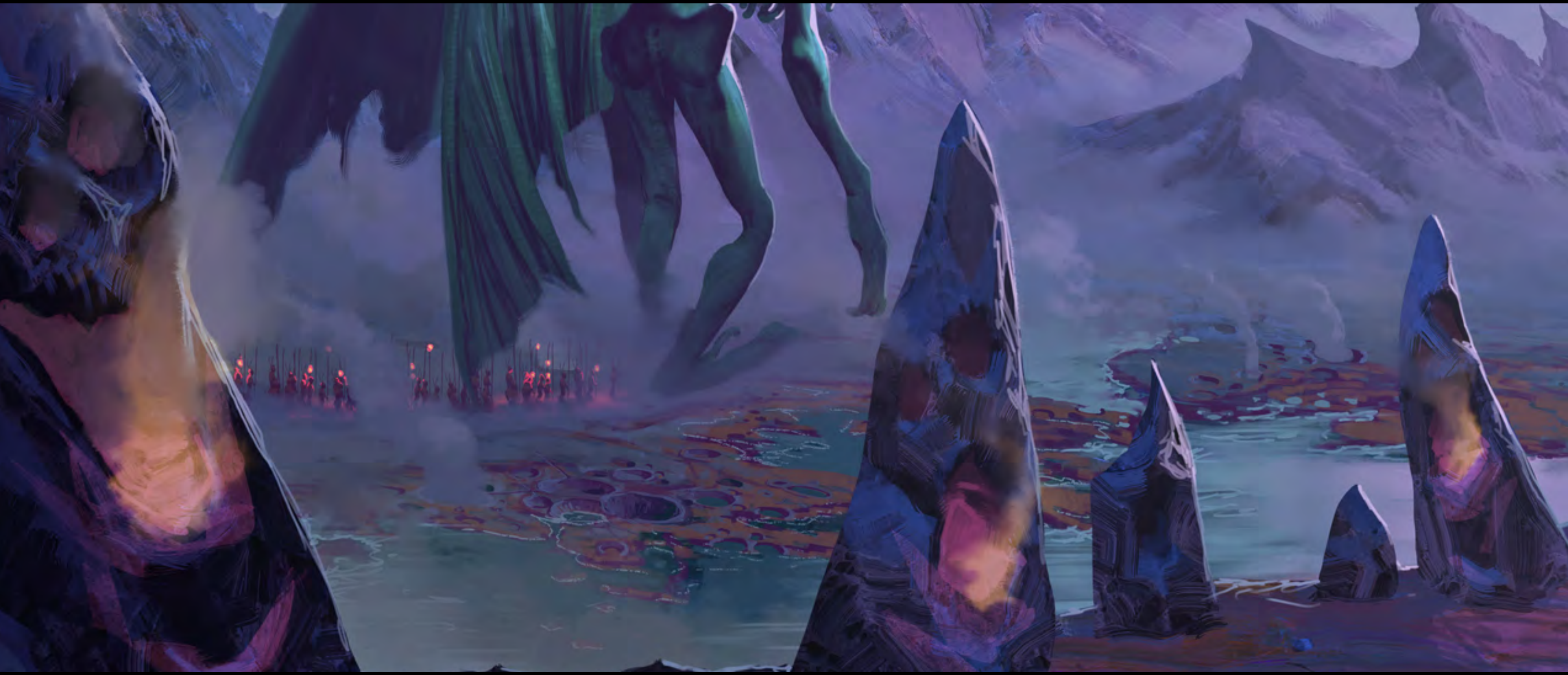
Falspecca: The vineyards and pleasant courtyards of Falspecca are still mentioned in minotaur poetry, but the city itself was buried by an eruption of Mount Parini more than 50 years ago. A temple of Ceres there was long popular for miraculous cures and cheap wine, and some believe that the Golden Granary might still be filled with gold and silver under all that ash. Every few years, someone gathers up a young group of diggers to go find the buried treasure; most return home tired and no richer for their efforts.

Adventures in Kyprion

Adventures in Kyprion involve conflicts with the forces of the Mharoti foothold, though they also touch on what the minotaurs have lost and what they yet might gain.

- Consort Pinaruti hires the PCs to pass through a portal in the Great Labyrinth into the necropolis of Chamiras and infiltrate the Mharoti legion there. He needs troop numbers, positions, and other strategic information before a counterattack can be considered.
- The PCs are hired by one of the queen's handmaidens to recover the Ivory Comb of Hecate, an artifact sacred to the minotaur people. It was last seen in a vault in the middle of the city of Gramvar.
- A portal has opened in Vespras connecting the city to the Labyrinth of Roshgazi (see *Southlands Worldbook*), and the malevolent maze is pouring through. Caught up in the confusion, the PCs must close the portal before all of Kyprion is consumed by the ever-growing living maze.

THE WASTED WEST



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Perhaps no region inspires more tales of terror across the face of Midgard than its ruined western reaches, a once-verdant land permanently ravaged by the Great Mage Wars. A puckered, ragged scar of desiccated land that tears along the edge of the Green Duchy of Verrayne and down the coast of the giant-haunted Carnessian Peninsula marks its southern border. The desolation extends north to the elven courts of the Arbonesse, where it gives way to lush forests. In the east, the proud, towering Ironcrags crumble into the foothills of the Goblin Wastes. As one moves west toward the Leukos River, the terrible devastation slowly lessens before finally halting at the vast expanse of the Western Ocean.

For centuries, tyrannical arcanists dueled over the ley lines of Midgard's western lands. Tremendously powerful mages built and abandoned principalities as the fickle ley lines shifted, and the constant magical strife among the rival magocracies slowly drained the life from the land. Only the bones of these cities remain today, their tumbled stones and spires covering a landscape pockmarked by acrid lakes and stunted trees. This is not the whole of the magocracies' legacy, however.

Worst of the surviving relics are the colossal, unimaginable alien creatures summoned during the war's desperate final years. The Dread Walkers slowly

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Seas. From across Midgard come those who would pluck fame, wealth, and fortune from the shriveled corpse of these dead lands, and those who would remake the world with magic best left undisturbed.

The sorcerers and wizards of the West retain stranger servitors, and still command great magical power in a land largely fallen into ruin.

HISTORY

Some 3,000 years ago, the island nation of Ankeshel sank and buried the history of humanity's first great civilization under the Western Ocean's waves, along with its vril magic and orichalcum temples. Dark centuries of barbarism followed and lifted only with the elves' arrival in the West. The remnants of humanity fell under the dominion of the elven kingdoms until over time humans again mastered magic and formed nations of their own. Caelmarath, most mighty of these kingdoms, bordered the Arbonesse to the south. The most gifted humans succumbed to the whispers of the arch-devils Mammon and his servant Totivillus, however, and spawned diabolic half-breeds and devilish abominations. These corrupted individuals plotted to control the powerful ley lines that crisscrossed their region.

Eight hundred years ago, thirsty for knowledge the elves refused to grant, the citizens of Caelmarath and the devil-blooded tieflings rose in rebellion. Though freed from elven domination, Caelmarath did not survive the Black Sorceress's Revolt (see Chapter 1). The war-torn land splintered into nine magocracies that competed to usurp the elf-controlled ley lines. Some histories claim that this long struggle corrupted the lines. The damage was great, and the magical roads were steered into dark territory. Doors opened to shadowy realms forbidden by the fey and stranger realms that beckoned from the dark between the stars. Void speakers and heralds of darkness arrived, offering the wondrous elixirs made from bitter sacrifice and blood magic.

When the elves abandoned their kingdoms and cities to walk other worlds, they left the magocracies with no common enemy. The wizards turned upon each other almost immediately.

The Great Mage Wars

With the elves gone, the nine magocracies vied for control of the ley lines. They sought to warp the lines so that their power might serve whatever diabolical interest the victorious mages served. Just as one magocracy asserted its full authority over the strongest lines, another rival would interfere. The contests rapidly became less subtle and more acrimonious. Any attempt at secrecy vanished over 400 years ago with the summoning of the Isonade, the creature responsible for the sinking of Ankeshel, by the deranged archmage Tycho Luz. It attacked the coastline of Allain and threatened to sink the western Arbonesse as well as Bemmea. Only the combined might of Bemmea's mages halted the devastation and restored the beast to slumber.

Summoning the Isonade sparked open war. No longer were the giant slaves of Balinor the most powerful battlefield terrors. Acid rains that stripped flesh from bone and dissolved stone were called down on the city of Cuculla by Dar Ramek of Vael Turog. Gokram Mod'hul and Sethus Krykk, tiefling sorcerers from withered Caelmarath, infiltrated Cassilon and summoned powerful fiends in the streets. Herkest Galbrion, Archmage of Molovosch, created the Fellmire when she conjured a lake-sized vampiric fog that sucked the life from all in its path.

The constant arcane turmoil stressed the region's ley lines to the breaking point. The mages of Allain manipulated their holdings to seize ultimate control of this resource by bending the lines in warped, unnatural curves toward power sinks they created to permanently anchor the lines. But this seizure of power had unintended consequences. Enkada Pishtuhk, a treacherous member of the Fulgurate Society—a group of arcanists from every magocracy who had joined together to make peace—took advantage of the twisted ley lines. Pishtuhk tore a hole in the fabric of reality and summoned forth the Dread Walker Pah'draguusthlai to destroy the bitterly hated rival Magocracy of Uxloon. Competing mages used the stretched and twisted nature of the ley lines to summon another horror to stop the Dread Walker, but it was too late for Uxloon and the magocracy was annihilated.

The eldritch conflicts escalated with increasingly alien monstrosities laying city after city to waste and withering all around them with each step. Only the combined might of the surviving archmages saved the world from consumption by the Dread Walkers. Unable to dismiss the creatures, the wizards instead halted time around them. Known as the Great Slumber, this effort condemned the creatures to a somnambulistic gait along twisting paths upon the parched lands of the destroyed magocracies. By the time the last Walker was slowed to a few steps each year, a desolate waste covered the lands west of the Ironcrags, and they stand little changed from that time of great ruin.

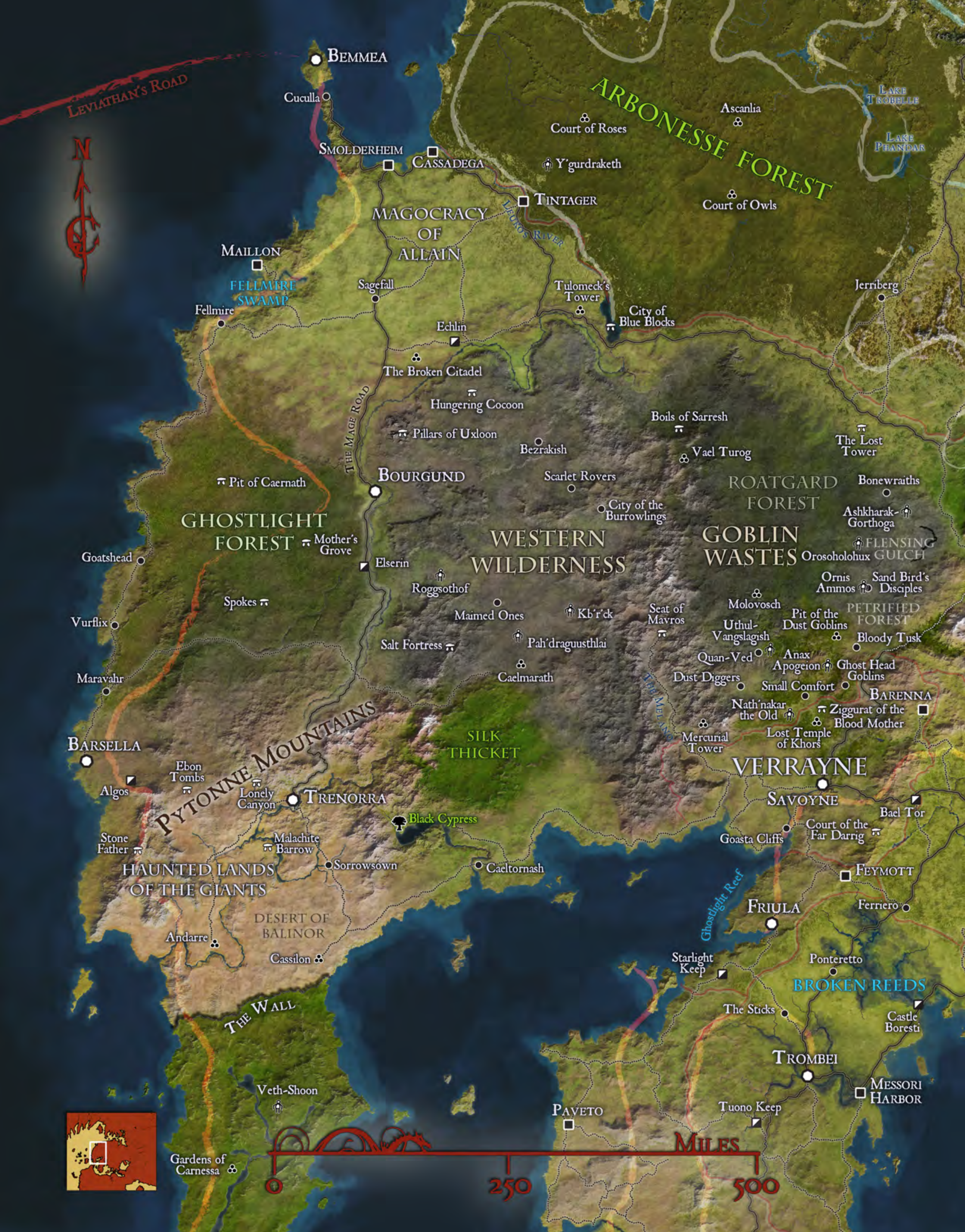
Lost Magocracies

Nine magocracies formed from the ashes of the empire of Caelmarath when it fell apart following the Black Sorceress's Revolt and the departure of the elves. Of the nine, only the Magocracy of Allain still exists today. The city of Barsella, while it has survived the last few centuries, is no longer a magocracy; instead it is ruled by a council of seafaring merchants and pirates with help from a few geomancers. The remaining seven "lost" magocracies are described here.

Andarre

This magocracy lay in the giant-held lands of Balinor to the south of the Pytonne Mountains. Great Andarre was ruled by the stone giant sorcerers of the Stone Coven caste until the Empire of Caelmarath expanded its borders beyond the mountains and enslaved them. The human and tiefling archmages used powerful enchantments on the stone-sorcerers, ordering them to put their subjects to work building new human cities for their growing empire.

The mages ruling Andarre grew to resent their distant masters in Caelmarath, so when the empire fell, the newly independent magocracy struck back at the former capital, first by sending its giant slave soldiers north, then by summoning the Dread Walker known as Roggsothof, the Fungal Horror (see page 236) to attack the city. Caelmarath


Bemmea
Leviathan's Road
Cuculla
N
C
Smolderheim
Cassadega
Tintager
Arbonesse Forest
Ascanlia
Court of Roses
Y'gurdraketh
Court of Owls
Lake Trobelle
Lake Phandar
Magocracy of Allain
Lauro's River
Maillon
Fellmire Swamp
Fellmire
Sagefall
Tulomeck's Tower
City of Blue Blocks
Jerriberg
Echlin
The Broken Citadel
The Mage Road
Hungering Cocoon
Pillars of Uxloon
Boils of Sarresh
Bezrakish
Vael Turog
The Lost Tower
Pit of Caernath
Bourgund
Scarlet Rovers
Roatgard Forest
Bonewraiths
City of the Burrowlings
Ashkharak-Gorthoga
Ghostlight Forest
Mother's Grove
Western Wilderness
Goblin Wastes
Flensing Gulch
Orosoholohux
Goatshead
Elserin
Roggsothof
Ornis Ammos
Sand Bird's Disciples
Spokes
Molovosch
Maimed Ones
Kb'r'ck
Seat of Mavros
Pit of the Dust Goblins
Petrified Forest
Vurflix
Uthul-Vangslagish
Bloody Tusk
Salt Fortress
Pah'draguusthlai
Quan-Ved
Anax Apogeion
Ghost Head Goblins
Maravahr
Caelmarath
The Melano
Dust Diggers
Small Comfort
Barenna
Nath'nakar the Old
Ziggurat of the Blood Mother
Pytonne Mountains
Silk Thicket
Mercurial Tower
Lost Temple of Khors
Barsella
Ebon Tombs
Verrayne
Algos
Lonely Canyon
Trenorra
Savoyne
Bael Tor
Black Cypress
Goasta Cliffs
Court of the Far Darrig
Stone Father
Malachite Barrow
Haunted Lands of the Giants
Sorrowsown
Caeltornash
Feymott
Ghostlight Reef
Friula
Ferriero
Desert of Balinor
Andarre
Cassilon
Starlight Keep
Ponteretto
Broken Reeds
The Wall
The Sticks
Castle Boresti
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Veth-Shoon
Messori Harbor
Paveto
Tuono Keep
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Gardens of Carnessa

retaliated by slaughtering the giants with hellfire and by opening a portal to the Realms Beyond in the middle of Andarre, unleashing shoggoths into the streets. Only by activating the ancient glyphs of the stone giants were the mages able to banish the blasphemous creatures, but in doing so they lost their hold over the stone-sorcerers. The surviving giants rebelled against their masters, and the magocracy came to an abrupt, bloody end. But it was too late to save Andarre—the wars had already reduced the city's impressive stone towers to ruins. See page 260 for more information on the ruins of Andarre.

CAELMARATH

The eponymous capital of the Empire of Caelmarath once stood in the middle of what is now the Wasted West, and indeed all the territory of the West was under its sway. The decadent city lay at the heart of an empire ruled by arrogant and debauched arcanists with tainted blood, for whom no vice was taboo and no risk too great. When the empire dissolved, the city of Caelmarath remained closely allied to Vael Turog and to the Eleven Hells, but it found its attempts to seize control of the ley lines successfully countered by the other magocracies. After coming under attack first from Kb'r'ck of Crystal and then Pah'draguusthlai the Devourer (see page 236), Caelmarath's tiefling ruler, the Emperor Medaharius Zais, and his Twelve Mage Council performed a powerful warding ritual to protect the city from the alien Walkers forever. The ritual worked, but not as Medaharius expected. As the last goblet of blood was drained and the final words of the spell were uttered, the city of Caelmarath and its 100,000 inhabitants vanished to a dark and distant corner of the Realms Beyond where they still exist to this day, held in magical stasis. To those remaining on Midgard, it was as if the city had been swallowed whole by the earth overnight.

The mystery of what happened to Caelmarath is a frequent topic of discussion among the mages of Bemmea. The Librarium Caelmarath in that city holds many books on the subject; some of them are more or less accurate, and one contains speculation on how to return the lost magocracy to Midgard.

CARNESSA

Centuries ago, the wizards of Carnessa left the Empire of Caelmarath to begin constructing their famous magical gardens in the southern jungles beyond the giants' Wall. The giants had built the Wall in their heyday to keep the jungles out of their lands, because the plants living there were unnatural and dangerous. The mages, however, clearly took the opposite view. The Gardens of Carnessa's purpose was more than a beautiful spot for afternoon strolls and picnics. Greenhouses and cultivation beds facilitated both fanciful and practical botanical experiments, capturing the essence of life and fertility.

By the time the empire split into the nine magocracies, the northern wizards had forgotten about Carnessa. Whatever the mages planned in their gardens is lost, but as the Mage Wars raged to the north, the wizards lost control of their own experiments. The intelligent, alien plants took over first the gardens, then the city, then the entire peninsula. Now, rumors of a previously unknown Dread Walker called the Emerald Walker are being whispered in the taverns of Barsella and Bourgund. See page 261 for more information on the Gardens of Carnessa and the Emerald Walker.

CASSILON

Before it became a magocracy, the Sun Kingdom of Cassilon was an ancient kingdom founded over 1,700 years ago, ruled by a human sultan and allied to the hill and stone giants of what is now the Haunted Lands. By the time of the rise of Caelmarath, Cassilon had become a hub of hill giant craftsmanship and trade, renowned for its woodworkers and beautiful runic art. As with Andarre, the mages of the empire took control of Cassilon, using powerful charm magic to dominate the giant leaders and enslave the population.

During the Great Mage Wars, the Magocracy of Cassilon allied with its neighbor Andarre against Caelmarath and Vael Turog, sending its giant slaves north to attack the rival magocracies. When the army was destroyed by hellfire, the warlock Enkidu of the Empty Hood summoned the Dread Walker Acqarak to attack Caelmarath. In retaliation, tiefling sorcerers infiltrated Cassilon and summoned an automata devil named Bazios and his squadron of chain devils inside the palace to seize the warlock and his associates and drag them off to their infernal prison. The fiercely fought battle that ensued set first the palace, then the mostly wooden city of Cassilon, ablaze. See page 260 for more information on the ruins of Cassilon.

MOLOVOSCH

The constructed island of the Magocracy of Molovosch floated 500 feet above the ground, drifting slowly in a circular pattern over the plains between the Seat of Mavros and the southern edge of the Roatgard Forest. Following the Black Sorceress's Revolt, the mages of House Galbrion traded arcane secrets to the shadow fey in exchange for the powerful levitation ritual needed to rip their city from the earth and raise it into the air. The spell required dozens of innocent human sacrifices, but this didn't deter the black-hearted mages who believed they could keep their city beyond the reach of Nath'nakar the Old and the other Walkers (see page 236).

Unfortunately, they were caught off guard when the mages of Allain summoned Ornis Ammos, the Sand Bird, which easily reached the flying city. The avian horror destroyed the Cobalt Tower that powered the city's flight. Molovosch crashed near the edge of the Roatgard Forest, killing all of its inhabitants and the entire Torn Ear dust goblin tribe.

Molovosch's crash site lies close to Uthul-Vangslagish, the Shrieking Mountain, and the selang village of

Quan-Ved (see page 232). That hasn't stopped intrepid adventurers and dust goblins from combing through its ruins in search of the secrets of House Galbrion.

Uxloon

The city of Uxloon stood northeast of Bourgund and south of Allain. The magocracy's territory also included the Citadel of Whispers (now the Broken Citadel), home to the unhinged archmage, Tycho Luz. Luz had been banished to his citadel by the wizards of House Neckart for proposing a variety of schemes to seize control of the ley lines that would have almost certainly resulted in Uxloon's complete annihilation. Left to his own devices, Tycho Luz did something far worse: he summoned the Isonade.

After the legendary creature had attacked the coastline of Allain and was restored to its slumber by the mages of Bemmea, Enkada Pishtuhk of the Fulgurate Society found out that Uxloon (or at least, one of its mages) had been behind the Isonade's reappearance and unleashed Pah'draguusthlai the Devourer on the magocracy. Uxloon was utterly destroyed by the Dread Walker. Now, only the mysterious Pillars of Uxloon remain where it once stood (see page 240). By day they are quiescent, and by night they glow with a delicate pinkish-white light.

Vael Turog

One of the most powerful of the magocracies and an ally of Caelmarath during the Great Mage Wars, the city of Vael Turog was home to over 100,000 souls at its height. In the days of elven rule, Vael Turog was renowned for its forward-looking arcane college, led by the dynamic and fearless archmage Teronidas Voidweaver. With Teronidas's blessing, a cabal of wizards within the college sought to master magic considered too dangerous by the elves, without their rulers' knowledge. Through infernal pacts with the denizens of the Eleven Hells, the members of the cabal and their tiefling offspring slowly gained power in the city until they dominated the city's nobility entirely.

By the time the Empire of Caelmarath fell, Vael Turog had become a formidable arcane stronghold ruled by the demonmarked, allied with Caelmarath and the Eleven Hells and the shadow fey. As the Great Mage Wars raged, the tiefling rulers of Vael Turog came up with a fiendish plan to cripple their enemies in Allain and Uxloon by unleashing a magical plague. With great effort, they succeeded in creating dozens of magical diseases engineered to weaken arcane spellcasters. Unfortunately, petulant in-fighting among the wizards led to catastrophe—the virulent magical plagues escaped from the laboratories and were unleashed into Vael Turog with devastating consequences. The archmages and other leaders succumbed within a day, and the city quickly fell into anarchy as rival arcanists sought vengeance against their foes. Less than a month later, Vael Turog lay in ruins.

Today, the Sons of Vael Turog fraternity at the Academies Arcana in Bemmea (see page 252) seeks to rediscover the lost knowledge of the city's arcanists. These wizards have been researching the magical plagues created in Vael Turog and are planning an expedition to the ruins to find the secret laboratories and unearth their dangerous secrets. It is to be hoped that they fail.

Twisted Fey and Unearthly Melodies

When the elves left, not all of their fey servants left with them. But those who remained were changed forever, warped by the alien radiations leaking through the doorways from the Realms Beyond and transformed into darker, twisted mockeries of what they once were.

The selang are dark satyrs who worship and serve the Dread Walkers, acting as their heralds and diplomats. Xiax Galleborne (see page 232) is one of the most notorious

Void Speech

Void Speech is the language of creatures of the Outer Darkness and the Realms Beyond, spoken by vile things malevolent toward humans and their allies and that seek to bring about a ruinous apocalypse of dark gods. Hearing the unsettling, alien cadences of Void Speech for the first time is disturbing and requires a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw. A character that fails to save becomes frightened of the creature using Void Speech for 1 minute (save ends).

PCs can learn Void Speech, but its strange vowel sounds, sibilant consonants, and unorthodox grammar make it twice as difficult to learn as other languages. It counts as two languages when selected as part of a background and takes 500 days (rather than the usual 250) to learn during downtime. Speaking Void Speech for more than a few minutes at a time takes its toll on a character's mental health. A PC who talks to a dark fey or alien creature in Void Speech for more than 10 minutes must make a successful DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or suffer the effects of short-term madness for the next 1d10 minutes.

selang in the Wastes, but the sorcerer Raak Talberoth is just as dangerous. Raak surrounds himself with an entourage of mamuras whose prophetic babble guides his actions as he seeks to return a "transformed" city of Caelmarath to the Wastes from the Realms Beyond.

Bands of dark satyrs have established settlements at the feet of many Walkers, including Anax Apogeion, Orosoholohux, and Uthul-Vangslagish. Swarms of tentacled dorreqi also gather around the ancient horrors in great flocks, serving as guardians and sentries. At the tent village of Quan-Ved ("Cacophony" in Common) which follows the ponderous route of Uthul-Vangslagish, the hypnotic and alien piping of the selang joins in twisted harmony with the wailing from the Dread Walker's fluted tentacles, the insane tootling of a large dorreqi swarm, and the distant drumming of goblin tribes. The resultant unholy din has sent dozens of mortal listeners mad. To the west, a dorreq of twice the usual size named Kenop-Ibb'ha leads a swarm of over 200 gathered around Roggsothof, the Fungal Horror. These dorreqi have sickly greenish-white skin coated with the Walker's mind-bending yellow spores. Already insane, the dorreqi are not affected by the fungus, but those who approach their master risk becoming afflicted.

The hag-like qwyllion are capable of dominating their foes and slaying enemies with a deadly gaze, transforming them into enslaved specters. It is no surprise that Braagezz, the warlord seeking to unite the dust goblin tribes under her banner, has enlisted these creatures to guard her fortress. Seelys, a powerful qwyllion with over a dozen specters under her control, lurks in the Melano River and preys on pilgrims heading north to the Seat of Mavros.

Black Goat's Flock

When the rulers of the magocracies turned to the Realms Beyond to summon the Walkers, the church of Bacchana, great god and goddess of night, wealth, fertility, and power, encouraged her worshippers in their endeavors and endorsed the Mage Wars that followed. Bacchana became corrupted as profoundly as the land itself, transformed by the alien influences of strange gods into the Goat of the Woods.

By the time the wars were over, her temples in the magocracies lay in ruins, and her sacred groves in the woods had been burned to the ground by fanatical paladins of the sun god Khors. In the years that followed, her worship was outlawed, wizards caught honoring her were banished, and her faith slowly dwindled away. Now, vile debauchery, unfettered chaos, and the pursuit of forbidden lore are on the rise, as insane chants praising the Black Goat of the Woods ring out once again across the Wasted West.

Dozens of cult cells dedicated to the Goat of the Woods have sprung up throughout the wastelands recently. Her worship is widespread among the dust goblin tribes and the giants of the Haunted Lands, some of whom believe joining the Black Goat's Flock will help them end the restlessness affecting their ancestors. Charismatic figureheads, often power-hungry and depraved wizards, lead the cult groups and seek to unearth the lost lore of the magocracies and recreate the blasphemous and debauched rites that gave them so much magical power.

Anton Valcrist is one of these wizards. Valcrist hails from Bemmea, where he has built a reputation as an unremarkable arcanist and scholar of ancient lore. Well regarded among the city's elite, he leads a secret sect of the Black Goat's Flock that meets in the basement of his townhouse to perform orgiastic rites of great moral turpitude. The wizard is slowly gathering lost fragments of the *Viridian Codex*, the litany of the Goat of the Woods. Once he has successfully restored the complete text, he hopes to bring worship of the goddess back into prominence, proclaiming himself a mage-king in the new order (see *Demon Cults & Secret Societies*).

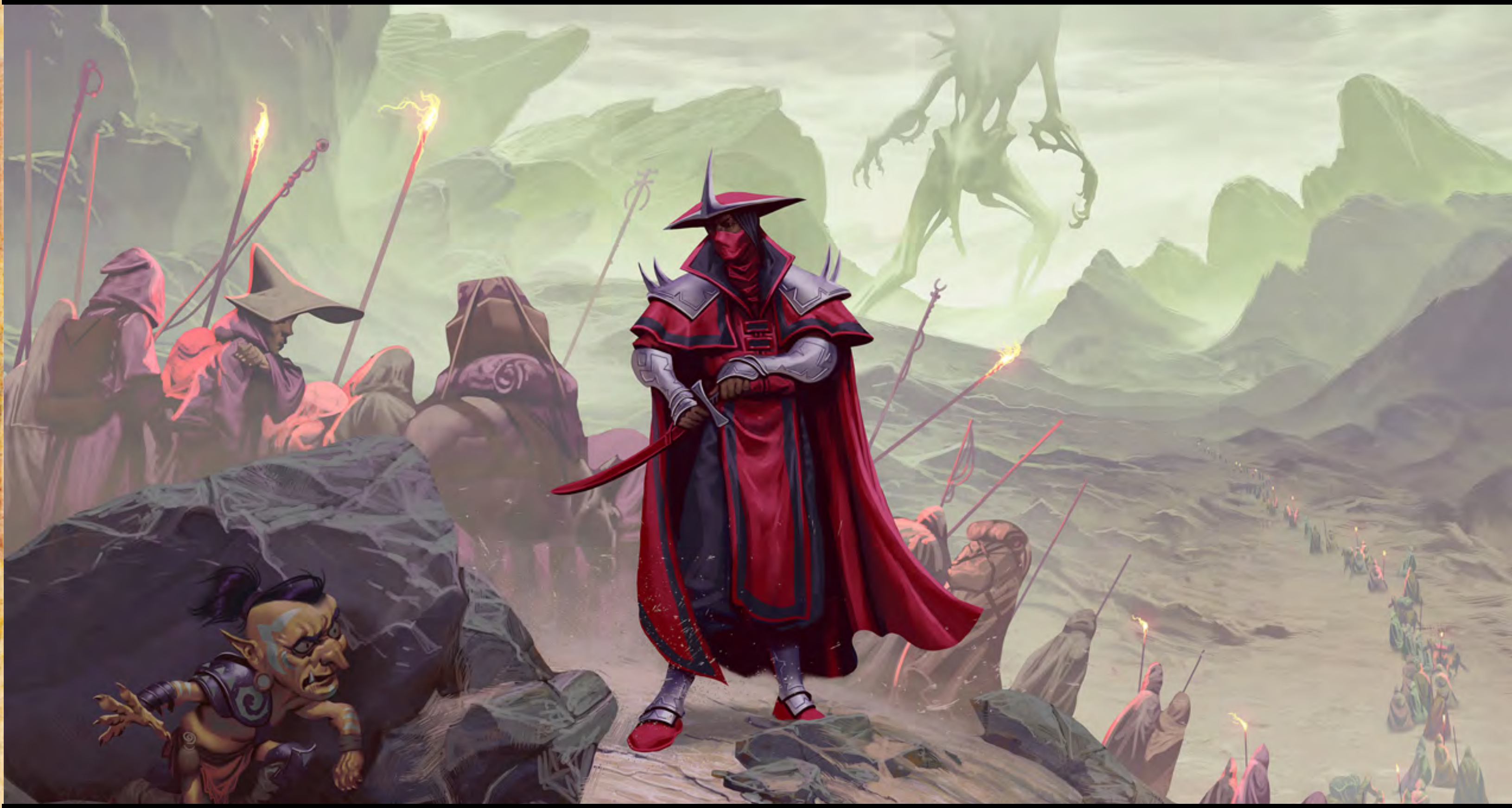
Tivishta Trikinta is the oldest and foremost of the Speakers, the Goat of the Wood's clergy. At first glance, she might be mistaken as a dirty, elderly goblin with an overly large head. The Grand Speaker is a powerful priestess who divides her time between the goddess's greatest surviving temple, the Mother's Grove in the Ghostlight Forest (see page 258), and the Wastes. Tivishta wanders the wilderness, proselytizing among the goblin tribes and border villages, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by a band of fervent goblin and human acolytes. Sooner or later, the cult's swelling numbers and chaotic ethos are likely to bring her into conflict with Braagezz, the dust goblins' new warlord.

Xiax Galleborne is another influential cult leader, an androgynous selang witch who claims to be an ambassador from the Court of a Million Stars, the most otherworldly of the Fey Courts. Xiax has the obsidian skin and insectoid legs and antennae of their race with delicate facial features framed with long auburn hair and partially concealed by a thick curling beard. The witch encourages their growing gang of adherents to embrace chaos by throwing off the shackles of authority and tearing down the status quo in random acts of nihilism. Xiax's unknowable motives make their next steps hard to predict, but the selang's influence, particularly among the dark satyrs, is on the rise.

Prophet of the Wastes

Batzas Anthemius (CE male human cleric 4 [Goat of the Woods]) grew up in Bourgund and was a squire in the White Knights before his lustful ways and penchant for getting drunk on cheap red wine led to his expulsion from the order. Batzas had been initiated into Bourgund's secret Cult of the Black Goat, and he was an enthusiastic participant in their debauched rites. After he was expelled from the order, his parents threw him out in disgust.

Homeless, Batzas left the city, traveling into the Wastes in search of the Black Goat's Speakers. In a crumbling wasteland ruin, he met the Grand Speaker, Tivishta Trikinta, who whispered the goddess's innermost secrets into his ear. Batzas swore to dedicate his life to the Black



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Wastes and experiencing strange visions brought on by a powerful cocktail of wine and mutant fungi.

Unwashed and unhinged, Batzas shares his prophecies with his flock of "true believers" from the villages of the wilderness. The prophet's band of adherents (CN and CE male and female human and dust goblin cultists) hang on his every crazed word and take part in nightly revels in the firelight of the camp, honoring the Black Goat. Batzas travels in a large wagon painted blood red, together with his harem of dust goblin concubines; the rest of the crew and several dozen chaos-corrupted goats follow along on foot. A pair of goat-men or schir demons sent by the goddess serve as the prophet's sacred bodyguards, enthusiastically joining in each evening's debauch.

Most of Batzas's prophecies and visions are incomprehensible ramblings, but he did correctly predict that a portal would open in the skies above Tintager, proclaiming that "the Black Goat's son would soon bless the world with his presence." Whether this was a lucky guess or a genuine insight is unclear, but the prophet and his ragtag flock are heading to the Arbonesse to pay homage to the newly arrived Walker, Y'gurdraketh.

Things have been tense on the border between the Magocracy of Allain and the Elven Court of Arbonesse for decades. The Feywardens, the soldiers and war mages of Tintager, have long been on high alert against the threat from the dark forest across the river, even though no such threat has emerged from the trees for decades. Instead, Tintager's human and tiefling patrols have spent their time battling goblins and aberrations that roamed north from the Wastes and conducting lightning raids into the forest to probe the defenses of the "elven aggressors." That's all changed in recent weeks.

Several months ago, three prominent rival cult leaders of the Black Goat's Flock came together, hoping to use an incomplete copy of the *Viridian Codex* to summon an avatar of the Goat of the Woods to Midgard. After several nights of exhausting orgiastic rites at the Mother's Grove in the Ghostlight Forest under a dark moon, the cult's priests succeeded in tearing open a black rift in the sky. Whether intended or not, the gaping hole opened in the skies far to the north, above the border between Allain and Arbonesse.

The swirling storm of warped eldritch energy centered on the rift damaged both the wards protecting the city of Tintager from the forest and the older elven wards safeguarding the fey from the magocracy. With the magical safeguards deactivated, a new Walker, the first in 400 years, stepped through the rift from the Realms Beyond and into the forest. The gargantuan, treelike monstrosity known as Y'gurdraketh is clearly a servant of the Goat of the Woods, perhaps even one of her offspring, resembling a much larger (and unburned) flame-scourged scion.

The appearance of this new Walker on the edge of the forest has caused consternation on both sides of the Leukos River. So far, the Feywardens and the elves have given the creature a wide berth, observing its movements from a safe distance. The two sides wrongly blame each other for the Walker's arrival, leading to a marked increase in violent skirmishes between the war mages and the elves.

Betrayal of the White Knights

Ever since the White Knights of Bourgund slew the Dread Walker Zhergthoth during the Great Mage Wars, the elite cavaliers have held sway over the mages of Bemmea. Each wizard swears an oath that binds them to a single knight, and they remain pledged to that individual, doing their utmost to protect them from afar with magic until parted by death. All things must come to an end, however, and the contract binding the White Knights and the mages is no exception.

It started with Daiquianis Exalter, former Master of the Armor Bonded. The wizard had served at his post in Mageholme Citadel for many years, carefully instructing newly recruited apprentices in the art of armor bonding. The mage would form a powerful bond with a suit of armor to be worn by their knight, allowing them to impart spells to the knight, scry on them, and communicate with them by means of a telepathic link.

ADVENTURES IN THE WASTED WEST

The lands of the Wasted West are full of adventure possibilities. The characters may wish to hunt for lost lore in the ruins of the fallen magocracies, search for vril artifacts under the waves at old Ankeshel, or study the Dread Walkers up close. Other groups might want to sow dissent among the dust goblins before they can unite under the Beloved Leader, battle the Black Goat's Flock, or fight alongside the Feywardens of Tintager on the Arbonesse border.

- The PCs are members of Verrayne's Order of Seekers, sworn to defend her borders against goblins, sorcerers, and aberrations alike. The rise of a new warlord among the dust goblins is a major concern to Duke Valis and he sends the party to scout the Mercurial Tower in the hopes they can discover what Braagezz is planning next.
- Pilgrims traveling to the Seat of Mavros are used to dealing with attacks from the dust goblins and the hazardous conditions of the Wastes, but recently something far worse has been preying on those making their way up the Melano River. Are the PCs bold enough to make the trip and bring their weapons to the god's seat to be blessed?
- The appearance of Y'gurdraketh has reignited the phony war between the Feywardens of Tintager and the elves of the Arbonesse, but the Walker and the cultists of the Black Goat's Flock are the real enemies here. Can the PCs persuade both sides to set aside their differences and join forces to figure out how best to deal with the newly arrived Dread Walker?
- Rumors are circulating in Barsella and Bourgund of a second previously unknown Dread Walker appearing beyond the Wall in the lush lands of Carnessa. The Founder's Council of Barsella is keen to discover if there is any truth to these stories, worried that trade could be affected if Carnessa's fecund plant life spreads to the north. Brave adventurers are needed to head into the jungles to investigate.
- Andress the Ageless, head of Maillon's Guild of Master Chemysts, needs someone to collect fungus spore samples from the dorreqi swarming around Roggsothof, the Fungal Horror. The pay on offer is excellent and Andress can almost guarantee the potions he supplies the party with will protect their minds from falling apart should they become exposed to the Dread Walker's spores.
- Glatisant the Questing Beast has been seen again in the Wastes. This strange creature is a product of the Great Mage Wars, when the destruction of a forgotten wizard's laboratory fused together four captive creatures. The result was an abomination with the head and neck of a snake, the body of a leopard, haunches of a lion, and the feet of a deer. Created by eldritch energies, she resists many forms of magic, and metal weapons seem to adhere to her hide. Glatisant's mournful, barking call renders those who hear it stunned, making these victims easy prey for her gnashing teeth and fell poison. The legendary beast has been pursued for centuries by knights called Questers, and by those seeking to retrieve the powerful magical weapons of slain warriors embedded in her hide.

Daiquianis had long served Count Tremvar Yellete, Master of the Order of Rose Knights, but in his waning years grew resentful of his lengthy servitude and inability to pursue other areas of interest. When Tremvar and his knights left Bourgund to escort an important caravan heading for Barsella, Daiquianis used his powerful magical connection with his master's armor to subtly misdirect the count, sending him into the perilous Ghostlight Forest. Colorful will-o'-wisps lured Tremvar and his men into the hunting territory of an ancient green dragon, and there they perished despite the best efforts of the mages bonded to the other knights. The knights' deaths freed Daiquianis and a dozen other mages from their bonds, allowing them to desert Mageholme Citadel and return to Allain.

Since then, other bonded wizards have felt the loosening of their magical shackles. Most armor-bonded mages remain loyal to their knights, but others do not, seeking to manipulate their masters and bring them harm to win their freedom. Tellanis Yazaron, the new Master of the Armor Bonded appointed by Duke Ignatius Martenne II, is unsure which of the wizards he can and can't trust to remain loyal to Bourgund.

Rise of the Beloved Leader

The dust goblins of the Western Wastes have been divided into a dozen separate tribes, each with their own clan leaders and chieftains, ever since Sun Duke Karlott Martenne of Bourgund defeated the last goblin king Dizzerax in battle. But now, a new warlord has appeared in the Goblin Wastes, and her power is growing.

Braagezz, self-styled Beloved Leader of All Goblins, cuts a fearsome looking figure. A well-muscled and mutilated goblin warlord with a vril weapon grafted in place of her right arm and clad in an ancient bronze breastplate of Ankeshelian design humming with power, Braagezz appears to be half-goblin, half-machine. She already has four dust goblin tribes under her control—the Dust Diggers (her own tribe), the Bloody Tusk, the Bonewraiths, and the Sand Bird's Disciples.

The Beloved Leader has promised her followers she will conquer the entirety of the Wastes, and she refuses to kowtow to anyone. She led the Dust Diggers against the Bloody Tusk first, slaying their gigantic chieftain Cragmaw, before turning her attention to the Sand Bird's Disciples, killing their croaking shamans and liberating the tribe from their bizarre diktats. Finally, she set fire to the legendary mummified goblin king Dizzerax, who had survived through the centuries to lead the cannibalistic Bonewraiths, thereby putting an end to his plans to conquer the other tribes yet again. Only the tribe of Ghost Head Goblins still eludes her.

Braagezz now controls most of the Goblin Wastes and has eyes on the Western Wilderness next. She has little time for worship of the Dread Walkers—it is she, the Beloved Leader, who the goblins should be looking up to, not slumbering alien monstrosities. For now, she is gathering her strength and preparing for the coming war from her base at the Mercurial Tower in the foothills southeast of the Seat of Mavros.

THE WESTERN WASTES

Though the spell that halted the onslaught of the Dread Walkers is some 370 years past, the destruction and corruption of these godlike abominations remains fresh. Travelers shield their eyes from the shambling shapes of the massive Walkers, hovering frozen like enormous statues of repulsive flesh over the crumbled ruins. The absence of natural ley lines in the region creates strange weather and supernatural storms as the land groans under the Walkers that continue to taint its sky and soil.

Apart from the looming Walkers and the strange weather, the dune-choked Wastes conceal the broken walls and cracked spires of lost towns and cities. Dark stairways lead to dungeons and old sewer systems, and the monuments of forgotten rulers and archmages stare with dead eyes. Roachlings and the degenerate descendants of masterless familiars skitter amid the debris, and mysterious screams and unnatural cries echo through the empty streets.

The taint of decaying magical energy pervades the region. Explorers report fields of doors—the only remnants of some destroyed towns—with strange lights leaking from behind the stone frames and cracked wood; rumors say these lead to other times in the Wastes' history, if not other realms altogether. Other areas host unusual twin spires of seemingly solid stone, gigantic sparks of arcane energy arcing between them. After nightfall, the flickering arcs illuminate the dunes in strange, sickly colors for miles and strike at specific races at different hours, as if directed by some alien intelligence.

So-called "crimson lakes" mark other areas. Visible rips in reality's fabric float hundreds of feet above the desert and drip a foul, bloodlike substance that accumulates in dark pools below. Such sites are sacred to some goblin tribes, and the coagulated liquid forms into sentient creatures if left undisturbed long enough (treat as blood zombies—see *Blood Vaults of Sister Alkava*). Adventurers also report that the constellations of Midgard vanish or change as one travels the Wasted West, particularly within a mile of the Great Walkers, making navigation across the lands difficult.

Mostly, however, miles of lonely gray dunes stretch ahead of travelers, punctuated occasionally by a lumbering Walker or the crooked outlines of toppled towers. Aberrations and horrors of all sorts infest these ruined cities, including gibbering mouthers, gugs, mordant snares, urochars (strangling watchers), voidlings, and mighty shoggoths. Packs of undead are common, particularly ghouls, but also mindless hordes summoned from the ruins by mad necromancers. Scores of tribal dust goblins inhabit destroyed towns or wander in transient tent cities beneath the shadows of the Walkers. The wastelands between these ghost cities hold dangerous predators of different sorts. Creatures such as giant scorpions, bulettes, and angler worms lurk among the dunes, picking off stragglers or attacking caravans.

The Dread Walkers

The Dread Walkers can't be dismissed from Midgard, and they can't be reasoned with. The inhabitants of the Wastes have learned to live with the sight of unearthly horrors over the horizon. Known as the Waste Walkers, Great Old Ones, or Walkers on the Horizon, many but not all of the beings responsible for the Wastes' creation have been identified by scholars.

Anax Apogeion, the King Far from Earth: This wingless, tentacled orb is composed of sun-burned flesh, writhing appendages, and dozens of gaping maws that hang in the sky over the last village it devastated. Dangling tentacles as wide as towers drag the ground, carving deep furrows in the dunes where foul creatures seek relief from the sun. Hundreds of skeletal corpses remain in the strangling grip of the creature, frozen in place since the Great Slumber.

Ashkharak-Gorthoga, the Warring Blasphemies: Distant observation of this chaotic mass reveals two horrors locked in eternal battle. Ashkharak appears as a massive, skinless humanoid with a writhing mass of leechlike heads; its body is engulfed in tentacles emerging from its slightly smaller slug-shaped rival, Gorthoga. Torn flesh hangs frozen in the air around them, and the Warring Blasphemies radiate an aura of uncontrollable bloodlust. Anything straying too near involuntarily wages bloody battle in their shadows. A decrepit goblin village is lashed to each of the Dread Walkers; like their hosts, these settlements are bitter rivals.

Kb'r'ck of Crystal: This truly alien being consists of interconnecting shards of near-indestructible crystal. Old Kb'r'ck never moved as much as grew. Its living crystals extended out from a central nucleic mass and encased all they encountered within its crystalline structure. Its growth is now slowed to but a few dozen feet each year, but the petrified remains of humans, beasts, and trees remain visibly encased inside as a timeless reminder of when Kb'r'ck grew with lightning speed.

Nath'nakar the Old: Foul Nath'nakar resembles a skinless, bipedal wildebeest sunk ankle-deep into the waters of a polluted lake. Enormous curved horns spread from its head, upon which is built a precariously balanced ramshackle village of doppelgangers. The Dread Walker stares eternally skyward, and the sun long ago burned out its dead, purulent eyes. Its sun-scorched skin is blistered and peeling, draped with dangling ropes and pulleys that provide access to the village above.

Ornis Ammos, the Sand Bird: This birdlike monstrosity fell from its high flight when it was ensorcelled by the Great Slumber, crashing into the earth below and breaking its wings and body in the process. Brown bones emerge from the exposed flesh, and huge, crab-shaped parasites scurry among its soiled feathers. The great creature struggles to emerge from its ruin at the snail's pace of its stasis, and an entire tribe of goblins had tunneled beneath the creature in an attempt to assist the great beast and elevate it back to its former glory. These goblins recently abandoned their mission to join up with the newly risen warlord Braagezz.

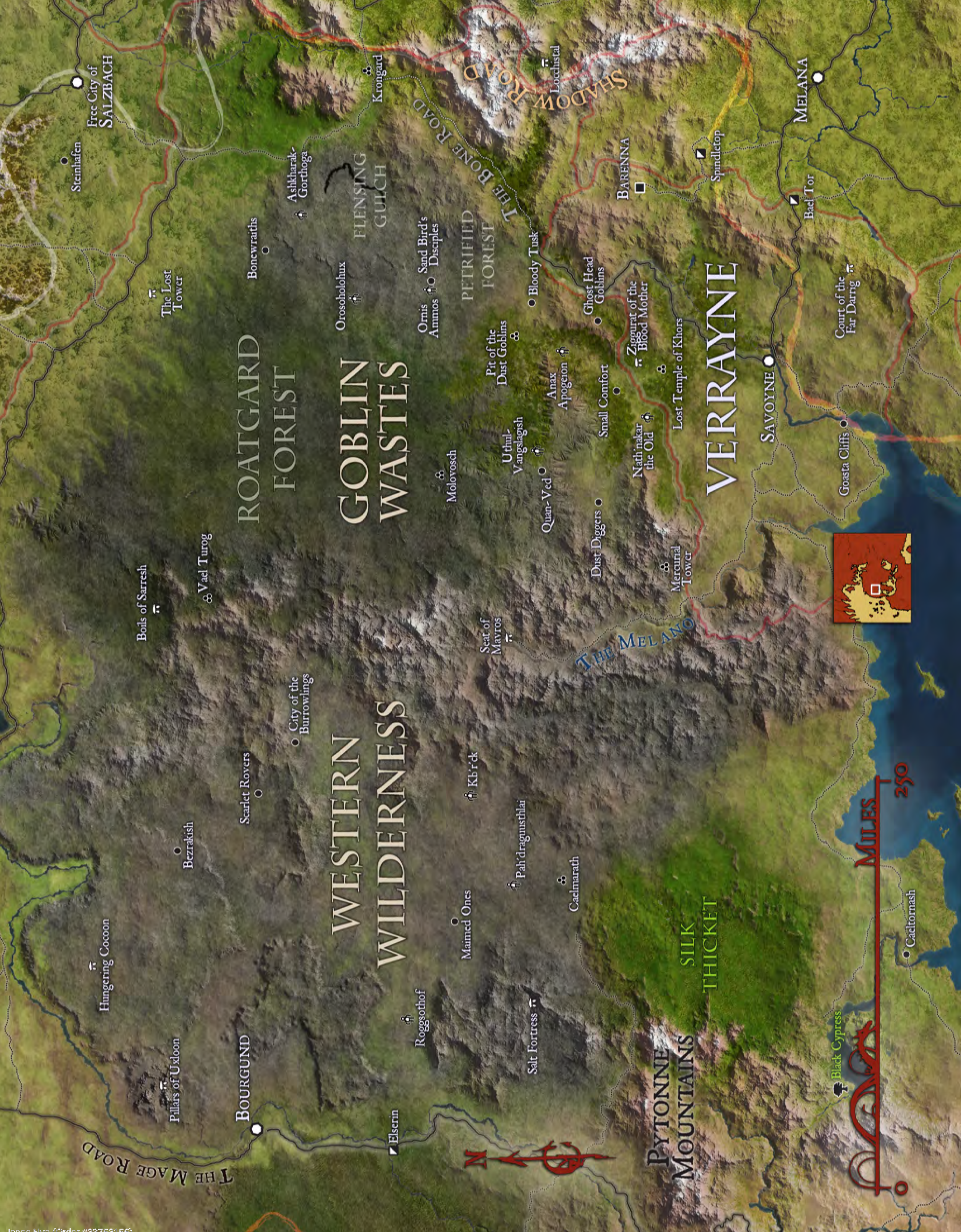
Orosoholohux, Stealer of Stars: This terrible entity is visible only at night as a looming, indescribable shadow-shape that blocks the stars from the sky. Those viewing the shape with darkvision report insane, gibbering creatures that leer and taunt from the shadow's edge. Navigation of the Wastes by starlight is impossible near the beast, since the strange stars of the badlands warp into unrecognizable patterns. Scholars and goblin oracles try to interpret the distortions for prophecies.

Pah'draguusthlai the Devourer: A headless rubbery-gray torso hangs supported by a pair of arms from each shoulder that split at the elbow into a second forearm, knuckling across the landscape on three-fingered hands that leave sooty prints. Its jagged, tri-part maw gnashes slowly, lined with spiderlike mandibles and spinnerets that spit strands of venomous silk to pull victims into its insatiable depths. The treacherous wizard Enkada Pishtuhk's sanctuary dangles from the creature's back, held there by webbed strands.

Roggsothof, the Fungal Horror: Shaded by a wart-covered cap hundreds of feet in diameter, this vaguely humanoid creature plods across the Wastes while a million mushrooms burst from its torso, blooming and wilting from its flesh. Surrounded by a sickly yellow cloud of spores, each footprint sprouts a wake of quickly decaying mushrooms, which are fiercely sought by goblin shamans. The spores of Roggsothof dissolve the minds of creatures that inhale them.

Uthul-Vangslagish, the Shrieking Mountain: Travelers in the Wastes hear this lumbering monstrosity from miles away. Its thousands of tentacles end in fluted openings that blast a continuous, discordant wailing, which ranges from sharp piccolo screeches to thrumming booms too deep to hear. Creatures in its shadow go mad from the cacophony, and scholars say the creature could tear the world apart with a single perfect note. A tent village named Quan-Ved has sprung up nearby—its selang and dorreqi inhabitants join in the alien music, while goblin war-drummers beat human-skin drums to communicate with the creature, with no sign of success thus far.

Y'gurdraketh, Scion of the Great Void: A recent arrival on the fringes of the Arbonesse and thus not subject to the Great Slumber, Y'gurdraketh is a gargantuan branching abomination with thick black tentacles in place of a head, a thick central body covered in slobbering mouths with peculiar beards reminiscent of goats, and huge hoofed feet. Y'gurdraketh reeks of a


Free City of Salzbach
Steinhafen
Krongard
Locchistal
Shadow Road
The Bone Road
Melana
Spindletop
Barenna
Bael Tor
Ashkharak-Gorthoga
Flensing Gulch
Bonewraiths
The Lost Tower
Orosoholohux
Sand Bird's Disciples
Ornis Ammos
Petrified Forest
Bloody Tusk
Ghost Head Goblins
Ziggurat of the Blood Mother
Court of the Far Darrig
Roatgard Forest
Goblin Wastes
Pit of the Dust Goblins
Anax Apogeion
Small Comfort
Lost Temple of Khors
Verrayne
Savoyne
Nath'nakar the Old
Uthul-Vangslagish
Molovosch
Quan-Ved
Goasta Cliffs
Dust Diggers
Mercurial Tower
Vael Turog
Bods of Sarresh
Seat of Mavros
The Melano
City of the Burrowlings
Western Wilderness
Scarlet Rovers
Kb'r'ck
Bezrakish
Pah'dragusthlar
Caelmarath
Maimed Ones
Hungering Cocoon
Silk Thicket
Roggsothof
Salt Fortress
Pillars of Uxloon
Bourgund
Elserin
The Mage Road
Pytonne Mountains
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heady mixture of pine needles and goat and stands over 100 feet tall.

Cursed Lines and Arcane Weather

The magical turmoil and strain has warped the terrain into supernatural badlands. Travelers report entire patches of dunes where all magic falls dead one day and is augmented the next. The absence of ley lines makes spellcasters nervous, and some spells perform at maximum capacity or sputter out for no discernible reason. Teleportation, shadow roads, and other magical forms of transportation are extremely risky, since without guiding ley lines, teleporting travelers can find themselves going nowhere, stranded in unintended locations, or even stranded between worlds.

Magic in the Wastes

Immediately after a character casts a spell of 1st level or higher, the player rolls a d10. On a roll of 2 or higher, the spell proceeds normally. On a 1, the spell slot is expended and the GM rolls on the Magic in the Wastes table below. *Dimension door*, *teleport*, and other magical transportation spells are riskier—for these spells, the player rolls a d8 rather than a d10.

TABLE 8–1: MAGIC IN THE WASTES

d%	Effect
1–50	Spell sputters and fails. No effect, spell lost.
51–60	Caster shifted to new location at random (within 1d20 miles).
61–70	Spell triggers supernatural storm. Roll 1d6: 1 = boneshard sleet, 2 = gravity quake, 3 = heavy air, 4 = magnetic storm, 5 = time storm, 6 = zombie fog.
71–80	Spell warped to include caster in area of effect (or excluded from protective/helpful magic).
81–90	Exceptional spell noise/light attracts a wandering creature.
91–100	Spell performs at maximum damage, double duration, and/or +2 DC to the saving throw.

Supernatural Storms

Adding to the danger of spellcasting, supernatural storms born of lingering violent magic and old curses can flay flesh from bone or even stop time without any warning. Several such storms are outlined below.

Boneshard Sleet: A swirling torrent of sharp bone splinters, these storms typically disperse as quickly as they appear, lasting no longer than 1d6 × 10 minutes. Perception checks that rely on hearing are made with disadvantage, and the bone splinters inflict 1d4 damage per minute on creatures unable to find shelter.

Gravity Quake: The ground shudders as dust and sand fly into the air, rocks and pebbles shoot into the sky, and victims fall upward. Lasting 1d4 + 2 rounds, each round all creatures in a 2d4 × 10-foot radius take 1d6 damage and must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated (save ends). On the final round, all creatures still in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or suffer an effect similar to the *reverse gravity* spell. Those who fail fly 2d10 × 10 feet into the air and hover there for 3 rounds before falling, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage per 10 feet fallen.

Heavy Air: These areas contain an abnormally bone-dry mist that smells thickly of ozone and extends for 3d4 × 100 feet. The inhaled mist weighs heavily in the lungs. For the first 100 feet, all creatures in the area suffer one level of exhaustion. From 101 to 200 feet, all creatures must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or suffer the effects of the *slow* spell (save ends). Beyond 200 feet, all creatures suffer an additional level of exhaustion.

Magnetic Storm: This unusual storm makes ferrous metals, including all steel, within the area highly magnetic for 1d4 hours. Swords can barely be drawn from scabbards, and metal weapons stick when striking metal armor. Separating any two pieces of magnetized metal requires a successful DC 13 Strength check. Such storms last 3d6 minutes.

Time Storm: Green lightning, singing winds, and up-falling water are all signs of a time storm. Lasting minutes to hours, creatures that have died live again and those that live might age to dust. Affected creatures must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or age 1d10 × 5 years. The aging effect can be reversed up to 24 hours later with a successful DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or by casting *greater restoration*. Otherwise, the added years become permanent. Additionally, all creatures already dead within the storm at the time of its onset are subject to the effects of a *revivify* spell as if they had died the previous round. Creatures can benefit from this effect only once during the course of the storm.

Zombie Fog: These pervasive banks of corpse-gray fog extend 1d4 × 100 feet in diameter and rise from sites steeped in ancient necromancy. The mostly intact corpses of humanoids caught in the fog's rotting fumes animate as zombies in 1d6 rounds and typically wander within the fog until drawn forth by the presence of the living. The concealment provided by the thick mists hides the approach of hordes of zombies until much too late.

Landmarks of the Wastes

Numerous landmarks can guide travelers in or near the Wastes, and the most well known are described below.

Bezrakish: A semi-permanent dust goblin settlement ruled by the goblin archlich Gnogrot Milkeye and thus not subject to the usual squabbling among the tribes. A hub of trade and a purchase site for vril items rejected elsewhere.

Boils of Sarresh: These large, rubbery bladders of air are the seedpods of enormous plants that gradually expand to the size of houses. Dust goblins harvest the air sacs for use as reconnaissance balloons and as part of explosive traps called "sarresh burners." Grounded sacs make excellent shelters, though they smell of salt and tar.

Broken Citadel: Only an empty shell remains of this white marble tower, once the Citadel of Whispers and home to the insane archmage Tycho Luz who summoned the Isonade from here. The Walker Pah'draguusthlai the Devourer destroyed the tower and Luz, but clues on how to awaken the great aquatic beast may yet be found in the rubble-choked dungeons beneath.

Caelmarath: Greatest of the magocracies, and capital of the fallen empire of the same name, said to have been swallowed whole by the earth. The city's exact location has been lost.

Caeltornash: A small town on the southern coast, south of the Silk Thicket. Its human and dust goblin inhabitants eke out a wretched existence through fishing and trading in plundered giant artifacts but must remain vigilant against spies from the Court of Webs.

City of Blue Blocks: On an island in the middle of Lake Leukos on the northern edge of the Wastes stand ten pillars of blue crystal. These strange square pillars are 400 feet wide and 200 feet high, made from a blue stone not seen anywhere else in Midgard. They appeared following the Mage Wars and have been a source of great interest to the wizards of Bemmea ever since. A number of expeditions were dispatched from the Academies Arcana to study the stone blocks, and a small community and trading hub has now grown up around the pillars.

City of the Burrowlings: A thousand holes in the earth hold hundreds of the creatures called burrowlings, which live easily in the Wastes and watch carefully for trespassers. They are sometimes friendly to travelers but slow to forgive a violent meeting. Dust goblins are their greatest enemies.

Fields of Eyes: From a distance, these strange growths appear as fields of blue flowers. Closer inspection clearly reveals them as small eyeballs on stalks, and they aim strength-draining rays at creatures that disturb them (equivalent to a *ray of enfeeblement* spell). Rift swine are immune to these rays, and small herds of the slavering horrors can often be found feeding on the plants. Dust goblins sometimes plant eye flowers as guardians.

Flensing Gulch: This canyon periodically howls with an unearthly windstorm that drives sand and pebbles with such force that they strip flesh from bone (treat as boneshard sleet—see page 238). The canyon offers a shorter route to the Seat of Mavros, and it is littered with the bones of impatient or desperate pilgrims. Goblin guides avoid the area, though great wealth is rumored to be piled on the bones of dead pilgrims within.

Hungering Cocoon: A filth-covered mound of skin and flesh, this castle-sized mass oozes erratically through a long chasm in the Waste, consuming those it overruns. Occasionally cysts on its surface reveal whole fetal forms of creatures floating within. Their faces seem aware of those outside, but if released by the quick slice of a blade, the prematurely birthed creatures choke for 1 round before dying.

Lost Temple of Khors: A shining temple devoted to the sun god stands bright and blinding in the badlands. By day, it glows with unearthly energy as priests of Khors, lantern dragonettes, and invisible servants serve cool water to visitors. When night falls, however, the temple becomes an empty ruin: cold, cracked, and haunted.

Lost Tower: The spiraling tower of the Fulgurate Society stood at a major nexus of the ley lines until Enkada Pishtuhk summoned Pah'draguusthlai, causing it to sink into the Wastes. Accessible only by the insane, the unlucky, or those well versed in arcane secrets, the complex is filled with deadly creatures from many worlds, dangerous traps both magical and mundane, and great artifacts of a lost age. From here, the Realms Beyond batter at the walls of reality, their many-angled monsters seeking access to Midgard.

Mercurial Tower: Once a great mage-fortress, this is now a jumble of stones and a highly enchanted set of tunnels and dungeons. The tower serves as the base of Braagezz, Beloved Leader of All Goblins and is guarded by qwyllion mercenaries.

Melano River: The black river is a sludgy mass of oozes and algal growth. Though technically navigable, the smell resembles an open sewer. Goblins are the only ones who find its water palatable without magical purification. A dangerous qwyllion named Seelys has claimed the lives of many pilgrims heading north to the Seat of Mavros.

Molovosch: The flying Magocracy of Molovosch crashed to earth here, forming a vast crater filled with the rubble from hundreds of crushed buildings. Angler worms and at least one mordant snare have tunneled beneath the debris and lie in wait for anyone seeking to plunder the ruin.

Petrified Forest: These vast areas appear as copses of trees, yet closer inspection reveals the stone-hard trunks of their petrified remains. These long buried "forests" have re-emerged from the sand, and some of the trees even exhibit leaves of semi-precious alloys. The groves are visited by protective earth elementals that clash with Ironcrag dwarves who want to evaluate the leaves' worth.

Pillars of Uxloon: These gray stone pillars, each more than 30 feet high, stand near small, bubbling springs and glow with protective faerie fire by night. Those who make camp near the pillars sleep soundly and safely, since few aberrations approach the pillars by night. In the morning, however, travelers find that the pillars have changed to a sheer wall of stone that deals 1d4 lightning damage per round to any climber. The walls separate and curl back into pillars at sundown and reform only in the presence of intelligent creatures.

Pit of the Dust Goblins: The town of Feycircle was protected from the sands of the Wastes by a fairy ring, but when its magic withered, it succumbed to decay and sank deep into the sands. The dusty sinkhole and the town's former keep are occupied by renegade goblins of the Bloody Tusk tribe and their trained dogmoles.

Salt Fortress: This irregular fortification entirely made of huge salt crystals and hardened salt mounds is manned by salt devils, skeletal undead overlaid with a thick crust of salt, and salt golems. Many believe that a dragon sleeps underneath the place while others speak of an imprisoned "desiccated matron" who will richly reward those who free her.

Small Comfort: This ramshackle one-street town in the Goblin Wastes offers weary travelers a place to restock supplies and enjoy a restful night's sleep at Mother's Peaceful Inn.

Tulomeck's Tower: Only the pyramidal base remains of this mage's tower. Tulomeck summoned a voidling during the Mage Wars that turned on the wizard and destroyed his home. Although such creatures typically return to the Void after slaying their summoner, this voidling has grown larger and dwells in the ruins to this day.

Vael Turog: This vast ruined city sprawls over half a dozen square miles. Dust goblins live here, but they avoid certain crumbling buildings that are still infected with the magical plagues that wiped out the city. Explorers should be wary of a shimmering in the air or the scents of clove, cinnamon, and anise—signs of the seeping magic or hideous warp and wrack plagues respectively. Visible from a distance among the ruined structures, the Leystone, a weird, black asymmetric triangular edifice, thrusts out of the cracked earth like the tip of a blade (see *Eldritch Lairs*).

Seat of Mavros

Perhaps the sole true oasis in the Western Wastes, this holy site of the war god Mavros is the spiritual center of the war god's worship in Midgard. An important shrine to the faithful, its remote location in the wastelands and the trials and tribulations one must endure to reach it have only heightened its significance as a holy site. Worshippers from every country hope to complete a pilgrimage across the Wastes at least once in their lives.

The pilgrimage promotes the bonds of comradeship between warriors and forces the god's devotees to prove themselves as worthy in battle. Priests remove all marks of social status or past accomplishments from travelers, and pilgrims must rely on their skills and each other to survive. The harrowing journey includes surviving harassment by goblin tribes along the Bone Road, risking capture by the mad druids of the Roatgard, interrogation by the Court of Webs, and the simple and deadly devastation of the Wastes. These trials burn away whatever pretensions remain in a pilgrim's mind. On the pilgrimage, all are judged by their skill and devotion.

Members of the Order of Mavros stand as sentinels over the pilgrimage route, particularly along the northern portion of the Bone Road, but they do not guard it. These taciturn warriors ensure that the bodies of pilgrims who fall on the journey escape the hands of goblins or scavengers and receive proper burial. They offer minimal provisions to the passing faithful, and they might even make the weary fight for a single swallow of sour desert water. They also give travelers a single warning against routes that take them too close to the Roatgard or Silk Thicket. They stubbornly steer pilgrims away from paths that veer close to the Dread Walkers, though travelers can make out their distinct shapes on the distant horizon.

A massive tent-city surrounds the Seat of Mavros, hosting all manner of travelers. Many settle here—including the faithful and those who would take advantage of them. Charlatans risk disembowelment to sell false relics such as saints' fingers or slivers of iron from the first sundered sword of Mavros. A sour lake provides foul-tasting but potable water, and merchant caravans risk the journey to bring in food. Whores beckon from behind dirty canvas tent flaps, and gladiatorial arenas, cock fights, and duel-pits abound. But warriors also come here to learn, and grizzled old commanders offer physical and strategic training or swap stories of past campaigns with young and old alike.

From the chaotic camp's center, the Seat of Mavros looms over all. To reach it, pilgrims must pass through the Victor's Gate. The seat, a massive throne chiseled in antiquity from the bedrock of the desert, now bears generations of carved prayers and inscriptions. A gigantic iron crucible sits on the throne, eternally burning with a roaring sacrificial fire that acts as a beacon to pilgrims for miles around.

Here, the devout ascend a stout ladder to offer up the sundered shields, broken spears, or brittle bones of their fallen enemies for consumption by the holy flame. Attending priests sometimes give this iron new life by forging the recovered slag into holy symbols and even weapons for worthy pilgrims. The pious claim the warmth of the altar fire repairs their own tattered armor and mends split shields. Pilgrims swear that weapons brought before the god's seat gain extraordinary properties in combat, flickering with sacred fire or sizzling with lightning.

FORESTS OF THE WASTES

Explorers unfamiliar with the intricacies of the Wastes are surprised to find not one, but two lush forests amid the desolation. Both seem to offer cool shade and respite from the Wastes, but that seeming peace hides danger.

THE ROATGARD

The inviting perimeter of the Roatgard—cool, shaded, and restful—soon gives way to darker depths. Skittering creatures watch with a keen sentience, and the trees thicken into impassability. Before the Great Mage Wars, the Roatgard was a beautiful grove tended by a sect of reclusive druids. The blight emanating from the Walkers forced them to take drastic measures to maintain their refuge. Natural trees grew stunted and wilted. The original druid sect long ago gave up their mortal forms and became sentient trees rooted into the loam of the Wastes to combat the corruption. In time, the land poisoned them, the taint drawn up like water into their transformed boughs. The custodians of the wood were forever warped by the profane energies.

Despite this, the Roatgard's perimeter expands a little each passing year. The deeper one intrudes into the forest, the signs of its caretakers grow more disturbing. Strange wicker totems hang with increasing frequency from outstretched branches, and the leering eyes of the forest's creatures gaze from the undergrowth with a sly malevolence. Trees display carved faces frozen in silent screams, yet close inspection reveals no tool marks on the trunks. The druids who tend their transformed brethren keep their mortal forms and transform captured trespassers into trees to increase the forest, reclaiming the land one cursed tree at a time.

Those forced to assume plant shapes retain something of their old selves, and their minds merge with the collective sentience of the forest's original guardians. This misguided attempt at reclamation worked for the druids who sacrificed themselves, but the forced sacrifice of captive trespassers leads to a madness that sours the collective sentience of the Roatgard. The druids maintain their dark traditions nevertheless, and they especially prize wielders of arcane magic. The transforming ritual replaces the victims' blood with sap, and if wounded thereafter, these trees ooze out sap demons.

The transformative magic of the Roatgard druids does not only create new trees. Blights and other terrible plant creatures arise from the druids' unnatural experiments and wander beneath the black canopy of the forest. Some transformed captives grow into carnivorous plants while evil treants—like the sadistic Oakwilt—appear frequently, spawned from the original druids.

The creatures within the grove are equally twisted. Evil fey exiled from the Arbonesse dart between the dark boughs, and perytons threaten all those who traverse this region. Stories of encounters with the druids themselves, while rare, say that they wear wicker masks to disguise their distorted features or that they take the shapes of strange and unearthly creatures. Tales say they use no metal—only stone-tipped spears and arrows, and armor of wood or bone.

THE SILK THICKET

Summoned from the distant realms to defend the Magocracy of Cassilon, the Dread Walker Acqarak tore into the mortal realm on eight spindly legs, its mandibles dripping with cold fire and its body host to a thousand-thousand biting parasites that dangled from its torso on strands of spider silk. Once unleashed, however, the parasites sought to free themselves. So it was that as Acqarak razed the heart of the Old Maeloth Forest, safe from the prying eyes of wizards who thought they controlled the uncontrollable, the horse-sized vermin swarmed over the body of their host. Spider strands as thick as a man's arm draped over the massive creature until it was trapped and immobile, a heaving, groaning cocoon anchored to the forest floor. Thus the spider-race of chelicerae found a home in Midgard.

The intelligent, spiderlike creatures have thrived in the forest for so long that the wood lost its old name and all now call it the Silk Thicket. High in the forest's canopy hang the dangling cocoons of hundreds of arcanists and diviners, still living yet paralyzed. The chelicerae consume the brains of these captured spellcasters, expending the spells stored within even as the rotting corpses dangle from the clenched mandibles of the long-legged spiders.

The chelicerae gather in a profane council known as the Court of Webs, where the enormous alien spiders drink the blood of Acqarak and dabble in forbidden magic. The court's leader is an enormous, bloated spider of Leng named Graggl'lach. Rumor suggests this creature was a

THE DUST GOBLINS

Symbol: Varies by tribe, often skulls or tattered cloaks. Braagezz's banner bears two crossed red vril weapons on a black background.

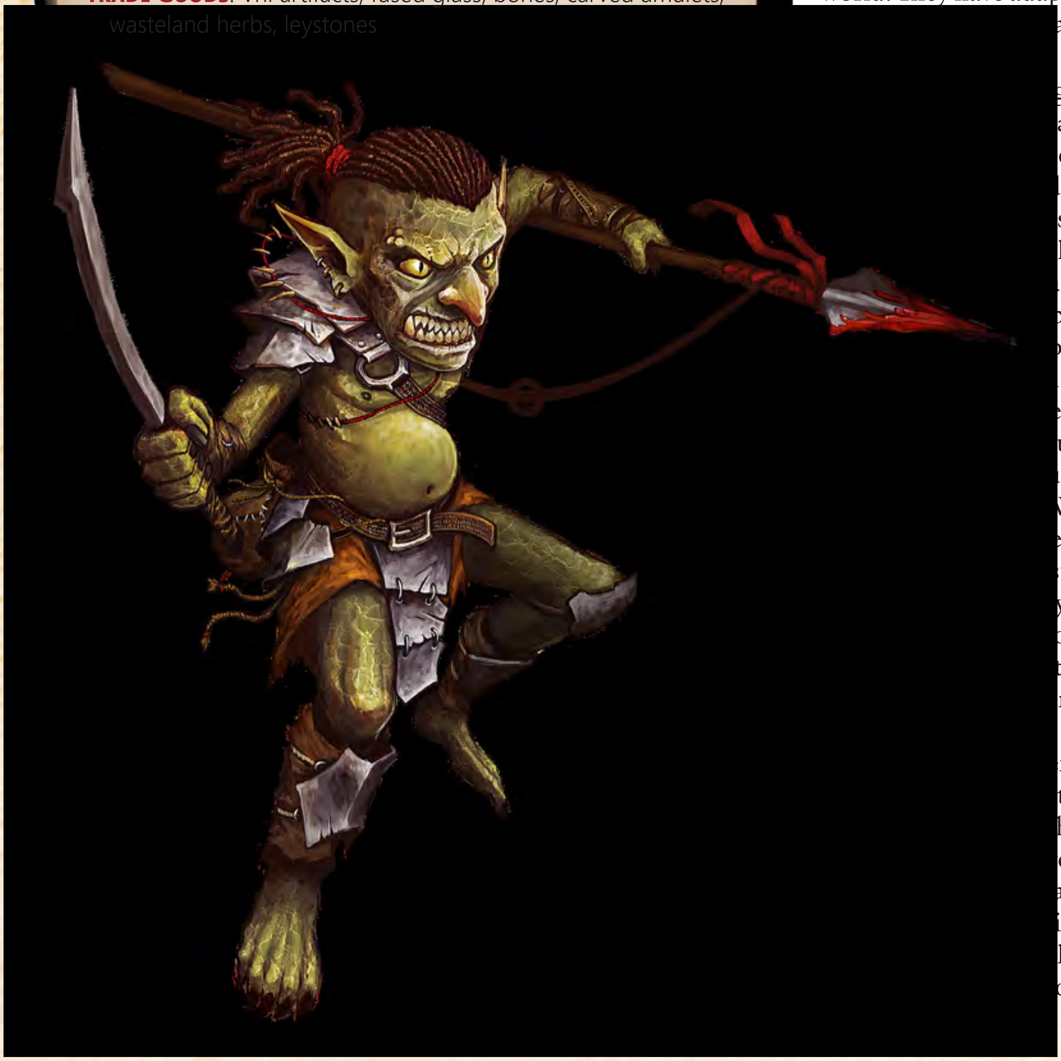
Important Personages: Braagezz, Beloved Leader of All Goblins, Ruler of the Goblin Wastes (NE female dust goblin fighter 15 [gladiator]); Crackfang, Spirit Caller of the Bonewraiths (NE male dust goblin cleric 5 [cult fanatic]); Fengrak, Chieftain of the Bloody Tusk (NE male dust goblin fighter 7 [veteran]); Kamelk Twice-Killed, Chieftain of the Ghost Head Goblins (NE male dust goblin ghost)

Population: Approximately 40,000, though estimates range up to 100,000

Major Tribes: Bloody Tusk, Bonewraiths, Dust Diggers, Ghost Head Goblins, Maimed Ones, River Rats, Sand Bird's Disciples, Scarlet Rovers

Great Gods: Varies by tribe, but includes the Dread Walkers, Goat of the Woods, Addrikah, Boreas, the Hunter, the White Goddess, Mavros

Trade Goods: Vril artifacts, fused glass, bones, carved amulets, wasteland herbs, leystones



hitchhiker on the body of Acqarak from an even farther-distant realm of dreams and that he fostered the rebellion against the Dread Walker. The Court of Webs knows that even with the slow crawl of time that imprisons Acqarak, the cocooned Dread Walker is morphing beneath the thick strands of web that hold it prisoner. Not even its million treacherous children can guess what might someday emerge.

Other spiders of the Silk Thicket include those whose webs respond to their mental commands and move like writhing serpents and those that weave the skulls of their victims into their wiry hair as a crude armor. Goblin tribes living near the forest ride astride these and other giant spiders, but the question remains whether the rider or the mount is in charge.

DUST GOBLINS

Until the Great Mage Wars, goblins mostly lived in the dark places of the world. Midgard's populations dwelt below the Pytonne Mountains and the contested western range of the Ironcrags. The darkness and ruin brought by that great conflict gave the goblins some respite from the light of day. Fleeing the dwarves' relentless westward push, the goblins finally emerged onto the face of the world. They have adapted well to their new lives in the
able goblin tribes call the badlands

goblins worship the Dread Walkers
anent tent-and-wagon cities in their
es and prophet-oracles see signs
er, and step of the abominations.
superstitions rule every aspect of
lives. Aged family matriarchs dictate
ily actions of even the lowliest dust
blin, from diet and mating decisions
feuds and war.
from deep within these goblin
eatures attempt to communicate
uence their movements. From
rrowed into the tail-mark trenches
Walkers, or the mobile rope-pulled
s lashed to the slowly lumbering
uperstitious dust goblins preach
yone. They take slaves to "enlighten"
of alien gods. Most go mad.
transient scavengers and salvagers
ruins to recover relics of a lost age.
in the ruined cities and settlements,
rritories see prolonged inter-tribal
take such fighting as a sure sign that
he zealous Walker-worshipping
e secular cousins wage bloody war
arcane academies and their artifacts.
including those thought long
lated by goblins that encourage trade
of weakness can set entire gangs of

goblins on arrogant or incautious visitors, however.

Interactions with goblin tribes can be touch-and-go affairs, but if approached respectfully, goblins can serve as knowledgeable and dependable guides to Wastes and ruins alike. Dust goblins have stoic personalities and carry themselves with a severe, upright bearing not found in their mountain-dwelling cousins. Quick to retaliate for any slight, these goblins can nevertheless become invaluable companions if other creatures earn their trust.

Dealing with tribal chieftains can be difficult since the strongest keep caches of powerful weapons. Dust goblins have a knack for activating lost technology and powerful relics that remain inert even in the hands of gifted spellcasters, and they use strange incantations to awaken even greater magic in items that fail in human hands. Adventurers who underestimate the tribes end up as powder or petrified statues after an icy glare and a flick of the insulted goblin's wrist. Their natural talent for repairing lost technology makes dust goblins valuable, and the more ambitious among them can even find lucrative work in the coastal city of Cassadega.

Beloved Leader of All Goblins

The dust goblins haven't had a single leader since the death of their last king, Dizzerax, but that may be about to change. A new warlord has appeared in the Goblin Wastes with ambitions of reuniting the tribes under her red and black banner (see "Rise of the Beloved Leader," page 235).

Braagezz, a cunning warrior of the Dust Diggers, became the chieftain of her tribe after her predecessor and half of his bodyguards died in an unfortunate accident involving a cache of newly discovered vril weaponry. Indiscreet members of the Dust Diggers talk in hushed whispers of Braagezz finding this cache a few hours earlier in the rubble of Molovosch, sabotaging it, and then burying it again where it would be easily discovered by the chief. Others point to the fact that Braagezz lost part of her face and right arm in the explosion as evidence of her innocence. Either way, Braagezz's rise to power has changed things in the Goblin Wastes.

After taking control of the Dust Diggers, Braagezz led her tribe against the Bloody Tusk, then the Sand Bird's Disciples, and finally the Bonewraiths. Proclaiming herself the "Beloved Leader of All Goblins," she offered the dust goblin tribes she had defeated the choice of joining with her to conquer the Wastes or of suffering a slow, painful death. Most chose the former.

Braagezz is formidable in appearance. Missing most of her nose and her right ear, her face is covered in hideous burn scars, while her right arm has been replaced with a vril weapon graft capable of blasting anyone and anything with a 15-foot cone of magical fire (treat as an enhanced *burning hands* that deals 8d6 fire damage). She wears an ancient Ankeshelian bronze powered breastplate that gives off an electrical charge to enemies who gets too close (treat as *shocking grasp* that deals 2d8 lightning damage to creatures within 5 ft. when activated) and brandishes a magic orichalcum battleaxe (a prize taken in battle from Cragmaw of the Bloody Tusk) in her left hand. From a distance, Braagezz seems to be half-goblin, half-machine. Her weapon arm and breastplate are powered by vril batteries (see page 258).

Ruthless, cunning, and determined to usher in a new "golden era" for the dust goblins, the Beloved Leader plots from the dungeons beneath the ruined Mercurial Tower in the southwestern hills of the Goblin Wastes. She still needs to bring the Ghost Head Goblins under her control before she can lay claim to the entirety of the Goblin Wastes, but once they are out of the way, she plans to turn her attentions westward to the remaining major tribes—the Scarlet Rovers, the Maimed Ones, and the River Rats—and those misguided dust goblins who still pay homage to the Dread Walkers. Braagezz also keeps a nervous eye to the southeast, wary of drawing too much attention from the Green Duchy of Verrayne. She has employed a dozen qwyllions as mercenaries to guard her stronghold.

Known Tribes

Dust goblin tribes concentrate in the eastern half of the Wastes, so much so that the area is known as the Goblin Wastes. The tribal names were bestowed by human explorers. Though the goblins find these names insulting, they reluctantly use them with outsiders. Goblins refrain from revealing the names they use among themselves for fear of the power that may give visitors.

Bloody Tusk: The Bloody Tusk village hovers on a huge black slab of slate nearly 100 feet above the desert floor. These goblins raise dire boars for meat, draft animals, and war mounts. They occasionally move their home by lashing it to their dire boars. Their new chieftain is Fengrak, a brutish, squat goblin with glowing golden eyes who has reluctantly sworn allegiance to the Beloved Leader of All Goblins.

Bonewraiths: The cannibalistic Bonewraiths craft all their weapons and armor from the bones of great ancestors or enemies to harness the power of the fallen. Their previous leader was the mummified legendary goblin king Dizzerax, who was plotting to lead a huge army against Bourgund and claim the corpse of the Fallen One so he could animate it as an unstoppable siege engine. When Dizzerax was slain by Braagezz, the Bonewraiths swore fealty to her. A wiry Bonewraith spirit caller (shaman) with over-dilated pupils and a nervous twitch called Crackfang now leads the tribe in the mummy's stead.

Dust Diggers: The Beloved Leader's tribe owns more vril artifacts and technologies than any other, and Braagezz has a good understanding of how to use the strange weapons and armor. This edge in ancient weapons has helped her subjugate the other tribes. The Dust Diggers' fortified encampments in the Goblin Wastes contain more war machines than they could possibly operate, some in perfect working order and the rest in various states of disrepair. More are being built in the tunnels beneath the Mercurial Tower for the upcoming conquest of the Western Wilderness.

Ghost Head Goblins: This infamous tribe contains as many undead goblins as living ones. They are led by Kamelk Twice-Killed, an unstoppable force who has been slain both as a living goblin and as a ghost, securing his legend when he returned each time. Many of his followers have undergone rituals to become undead "horrors"—treat these ghost goblins as zombies with the ability to affect a single creature with *fear* as the spell unless it makes a successful DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. The goblin horrors can use this power once per day. Travelers should give these fanatics a wide berth since their will is strong enough to defy death.

Maimed Ones: No one truly understands the fanatical Maimed Ones. Why would anyone willingly sacrifice a limb to join a tribe of maimed outcasts? Only their leaders—called the Bearers—know, since they offer the amputated limbs to various Dread Walkers. Each time, they receive a secret revelation, shared only with the still-bleeding goblin. Worse yet, these goblins collect the limbs of other creatures to offer up as well, for with each sacrifice, the Dread Walkers reveal more secrets of the universe.

River Rats: The pilgrims who try to reach the Seat of Mavros by water encounter at least one of the decrepit "warships" of the River Rats, some rickety platforms barely worthy of the name raft. The Rats see themselves as pirates. Most others view them as a nuisance. However, the pests are numerous, tenacious, and not to be underestimated, especially when they summon their allies from beneath the river's waters.

Sand Bird's Disciples: Living in a series of connected underground nests, these strange goblins once tried to emulate the Walkers in every aspect of their lives. The croaking voice of Ornis Ammos's shamans was law, and their brainwashed followers blindly obeyed. When Braagezz and the Dust Diggers subjugated the tribe, the shamans were all killed and worship of the Dread Walkers quickly ended, but many of the Sand Bird's Disciples still live beneath the creature out of habit. Like the plumage of the Sand Bird, their nests are shared with all kind of parasites, and they have domesticated stirges for use as guards and food. The Sand Bird's plumes are used to build primitive gliders, so the goblins can swoop down to surprise trespassers.

Scarlet Rovers: When explorers see goblins wearing the red capes of Mavros, they face the Scarlet Rovers, one of the most dangerous tribes of the badlands. These disciplined goblins can vanquish experienced soldiers. Though their numbers are few and their intentions mysterious, their talent as guides and bodyguards is well known and sought after, though their reputation as assassins who can quickly double-cross their employers is not unfounded.

Green Duchy of Verrayne

A surviving fragment of the once-awesome Magocracy of Caelmarath, the Green Duchy of Verrayne now stands as a vital guardian against the Goblin Wastes, keeping a close watch on its northern border at all times from its villages and strongholds. The gorges and hills of this region make perfect defensive ground, and Verrayne's defenders resolutely hold them against the horrors of the Wastes. Most years, the mule trains and pilgrims pass north with few losses, but when the hordes do come, they bring terrors few can bear. The Green Duke and the Oaken Council stand ready as ever to answer that call, wand and shield and mistletoe in hand.

Government

The druids of the Oaken Ring appointed Salusso Valis to rule when the former duke, Gareth Albrioc, died in a hunting accident without any heirs. Duke Valis, a hardened warrior and general, formerly served as Castellan of the Nine Towers. Well aware of the dangers of the Wasted West, the duke has brought in Bemmean sorcerers and wizards to strengthen the arcane defenses of the Nine Towers, made agreements with some of the "civilized" goblin tribes as a buffer against their more savage cousins, and taken other steps not entirely to the liking of the local druids. The rise of Braagezz in the Goblin Wastes is causing him consternation, and Valis has doubled the intake of new recruits into the Order of Seekers to ensure the actions of the new dust goblin warlord are closely monitored.

The duke is increasingly paranoid about assassination and keeps at least four of his Black Band around him at all times. These eclectic warriors and sorcerers claim to be the mightiest heroes in the West, and they might be right. Sylvio is a towering, bald warrior-priest of Volund who enjoys crushing goblin skulls with great warhammer. Pernilla Pearlbow is a deadly swordswoman. A former noble among the shadow fey, she was forced to flee the court after humiliating Sir Rujan, Knight of the Barnacle Tree, in a bridge duel. The wizard Urlando studied at the Academies Arcana in Bemmea and is an expert in dealing with the horrors of the Wastes. Kemrath is a tiefling sorcerer who fought as one of the Feywardens on the Tintager-Arbonesse border for several years before traveling south to join the Black Band. Her intimidating appearance ensures most folk give her a wide berth.

Savoyne, City of Blood

The city of Savoyne's layered fortifications begin with the watch castles and signal fires on the surrounding hills and continue to double rows of thick walls. The city is relatively small by southern standards, though well kept.

Goblin travelers enter town only rarely and under close supervision. They bring news and rumors of the aberrations in the Wastes and which chieftains have risen and fallen. Some smuggle ancient treasures into Savoyne, though the Seekers (see below) arrest and execute humans and goblins who traffic in these lucrative goods.

The Duke's Gardens, a point of pride for the entire realm, serve as the site for the Rites of Spring, High Summer festival, and Harvest festivals. They also house a magical connection to the Elflands. Supposedly, only the Green Duke and the druids of the Oaken Ring know all the secrets of the magical portal, and its opening ritual remains a state secret.

RAVEN'S WALL

The city's northern wall hosts executions, since the Green Duchy takes no dust goblin prisoners. The blood of beheaded goblins gives the northern wall its characteristic color, and their heads, rotting on the battlement spikes, attract great flocks of ravens.

TEMPLE OF THE TWINS

The green gods Yarila and Porevit dominate rural worship and have a living temple of woven trees and flowers in the center of Savoyne. It is a peaceful place, where visitors bring offerings of grain, fruits, woods, and nuts. The priests bless goats, seed corn, and the bounty of the earth. The head of the temple is Green Priestess Losaneta, a young druid and member of the Oaken Ring. She reports on city doings to Blood Mother Margase.

The druids outside the city are rather harsher and more ruthless than those at the Temple of the Twins, and they manipulate young Losaneta shamelessly.

NINE TOWERS

Nine great and small castles and watchtowers form the Green Duchy's defenses against the Goblin Wastes. Most of Verrayne's army is garrisoned at these defenses, and they keep out the majority of threats. The fortifications see annual repair and improvement through the duke's corvee, a mandatory period of service for all of Verrayne's people other than its nobles and soldiers. The fortifications are well stocked for sieges and assaults, and their garrisons trained and experienced.

The commander of the Tower Watch is Olfen Abromo, a ranger and member of the Order of Seekers who is also (secretly) a werewolf. He controls his curse well enough to lead a hunt through the Western Wastes each month. He stalks and kills wizards for sport and without regret.

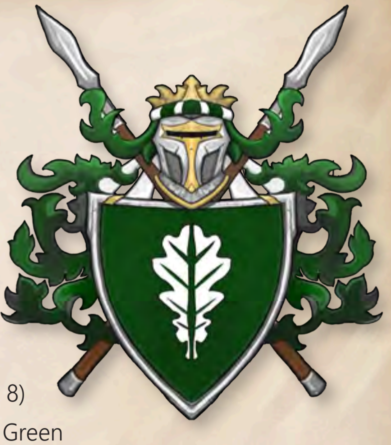
ORDER OF SEEKERS

This elite order of rangers and fighters swear to hold the borders against the goblins and aberrant hordes. Seekers serve with distinction at the Nine Towers, and they also have a duty to stay vigilant against arcane magic that might punch further holes in the duchy's defenses.

The Seekers watch sorcerers, wizards, and others throughout the nation for suspicious activity. Those visiting from Bemmea and Friula receive an individual guide or minder during their stay, and the Seekers cooperate with the Oaken Ring to track the most powerful arcanists. This involves blood wards and druid marks to alert the Seekers when the subject uses summoning or diabolical magic.

Many dukes have personally led the Seekers over the years, and Salusso Valis is no exception. The Seekers serve as his eyes and ears throughout the duchy, and as officers and recruiters they are responsible for mustering the militia in times of greatest danger. All men of Verrayne over 16 are members of their local militias and train with

GREEN DUCHY OF VERRAYNE



SYMBOL: A black tower with a green curved hill below

RULER: His Luminance Salusso Valis, Green Duke of Verrayne, Lord of the Nine Towers (CG male human ranger 8)

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: Green Priestess Losaneta of the Oaken Ring (N female human); Blood Mother Margase (NE female red hag); Tower Watch Commander Olfen Abromo (NG male human werewolf); Sylvio of the Black Band (NG male human); Pernilla Pearlbow of the Black Band (CN female shadow fey); Urlando of the Black Band (NG male human); Kemrath of the Black Band (CG female tiefling); Thistlegloom, King of the Far Darrig (CN male far darrig)

POPULATION: 344,700 (318,000 humans, 16,700 dwarves)

CAPITAL: Savoyne, population 18,700 (16,500 humans, 2,200 dwarves)

CITY: Barenna, population 9,000

TOWN: Goasta Cliffs, population 1,500

CASTLES: Bael-Tor, the Nine Towers

GREAT GODS: Yarila and Porevit (patrons), Charun, Hecate, Lada, Volund

TRADE GOODS: Mules, donkeys, oaken casks and barrels, copper, fine masonry, pigs, goats, barley spear, bow, or axe to serve when called; unmarried women are expected to serve as archers, scouts, or drovers when the army is in the field, though they rarely carry infantry weapons such as pikes or axes.

The Oaken Ring

The druids of Verrayne are far stronger than in most lands because of their key role in holding the line against the Goblin Wastes. They view arcane spellcasters as more dangerous than useful and actively persecute them within the duchy. The duke's personal protection is all that keeps some wizards in the land. The Oaken Ring druids even suspect the scholars of Friula because they fraternize with mages, harbor arcane works and knowledge, and are surely capable of summoning horrors with such magic.

The druids favor harsh defensive measures, including creating a company of werewolf soldiers, using human sacrifices to purify the corrupted lands to the west, reading divinations in the entrails of pegasi or unicorns, and darker practices. For them, one can argue morality only while alive and untainted. Many of these druids claim ties to the fey and the elves of the Arbonesse, though few are elfmarked. They strive to restore the Wastes, a program that will take many generations.

Blood Mother Margase

The leader of the Oaken Ring is Blood Mother Margase. She answers to no one but the gods, and at times it is unclear how much authority she believes the duke holds. Certainly her age makes her cynical, for Margase is as ancient as many of the oaks of Verrayne. Some believe she is related to Baba Yaga. Margase and her followers seek to annihilate arcane spellcasters within her territories, sacrificing them to Hecate for her continued favor and giving thanks for their untainted natural magic. The mean-spirited clurichaun and far darrig serve as Margase's spies throughout the duchy—these spiteful fey hate wizards and are all too willing to tip off the red hags or kidnap a vulnerable arcanist.

Due to Margase's leadership, Verrayne has held strong against horde uprisings. She has the force of the forest behind her, and no army has fared well while traveling in her domain. Many ignorant human invaders have bled their lives into the soil for the good of Verrayne.

To better lead the efforts of the Oaken Ring in restoring the Wastes, the Blood Mother seeks to ascend to godhood. Her plans took a giant leap forward when she recovered the ruling staff of the red hag Queen Arligathas from the waters around Ghostlight Reef. She still needs to obtain three other artifacts to complete the *Ritual of Apotheosis* that will allow her to become a god, and she has plans underway to track them down. This may take a year or two, but Blood Mother Margase is nothing if not patient.

Ziggurat of the Blood Mother

When she is not in Savoyne meeting with the duke and the Oaken Council, Blood Mother Margase resides in a ziggurat temple in the forest wilderness of Verrayne. Built on top of a wooden hill and guarded by a pack of werewolves, this temple is dedicated to the dark goddess Hecate and is the site of many blood sacrifices by Margase, her red hag followers, and the druids of the Oaken Ring. The victims are sorcerers and wizards captured by her agents, and up to a dozen hapless prisoners are held in cells inside the ziggurat until the next new moon.

Other Sites

Bael-Tor: The only castle of Verrayne not devoted to fending off the monstrosities of the Goblin Wastes, this is a simple and well-designed castle looking out over the plains toward Melana.

Barenna: A town of merchants who trade with the dwarves of the Ironcrags and salt sellers from the free city of Salzbach.

Court of the Far Darrig: A forested glade deep in the wilderness is home to the royal court of the far darrig, a race of small fey who once served as hunters and herders for the elves of the Arbonesse. Their king, Thistlegloom, is allied to the Oaken Ring and has sent some of his weasel-riders to serve the druids.

Goasta Cliffs: At the mouth of the Albrus River, Verrayne's only port houses those who fish the Middle Sea and roosting populations of wyverns and other scaled creatures. This bothers visitors more than townsfolk.

Grand Duchy of Bourgund

Against the Wastes' stark western border stands the gleaming jewel of Bourgund. Many remark on the impossibility of a city nestled so near the badlands with nary a crumbled tower or pockmarked wall. Within its gleaming walls, order is all. The noble White Knights patrol the pristine streets wearing intricate armor, carrying shining shields, and flying embroidered banners without the slightest hint of dust or decay.

Outside the city walls lies the massive body of Zhergthoth the Fallen One, the only Dread Walker felled by mortal magic and sharp steel, mummifying in the dry desert winds. The corpse's slow rot is the one foulness the citizens of Bourgund cannot easily erase, though the heavy, cloying perfumes made here are unrivaled for their strength and longevity. The irony of such sweetness originating on the edge of such foulness is not lost on knowledgeable buyers.

Bourgund is not populous, but its citizens are exceptionally privileged. The duke ensures that all citizens make a comfortable living. Bourgund's gleaming streets lack the characteristic slums of other cities its size. Crime is rare, and signs of affluent comfort abound. All these privileges come with acute expectations and a high price. Bourgund is tightly watched. Citizens never know when wizards might be scrying with spell, crystal, or familiar. Vagrancy of any sort is a crime. The citizens maintain a foppish, smiling facade to hide their real terror of the strict laws that preserve this veneer. A thriving black market exists, with trade in *amulets of proof against detection and location* and other wondrous items that protect against scrying being popular, and it serves those who wish a little more freedom of action.

Garrisoned by White Knights, the shining walled castle of Elserin stands guard over the Mage Road just south of the city.

Government

Duke Ignatius Martenne II is the latest in a long, noble line. His ancestor, the Sun Duke Karlott Martenne, broke his fiefdom from Allain after he first defeated the (then-mortal) goblin king Dizzerax, last ruler of the united goblin tribes. Duke Ignatius lacks his ancestor's prowess. Pretentious and egotistical, he sees himself as ruling Bourgund by might rather than birth. None dare to tell him that his battlefield prowess—proven only on carefully managed jousting fields—is lacking at best. He excels as the square-jawed and charismatic leader of his people, however. His hereditary influence over the mages of Bemmea, combined with the White Knights' proven power and his own lack of perspective, lets him presume no equal to his might in Midgard.

Though the undisputed ruler of Bourgund, Duke Ignatius receives advice from the Council of White Counts, hereditary lords who control the counties outside the city's walls and oversee the duchy's agriculture. The duke and his counts are served by numerous mages, including Bemmean mages indentured to the duke through ancient oaths. The White Knights' various orders, including the duke's elite Rose Knights, serve at the behest of the combined council.

Order is an art in Bourgund. Each district is strictly regulated. Businesses open and close like clockwork. A market warden—a severe, no-nonsense bureaucrat—oversees each commercial street and keeps a retinue of White Knights within easy calling distance. Residential districts have similar overseers, and trash or refuse is rare on the sparkling streets. Bourgundians highly prize mithral, and the city is blessed with a strong vein whose mining is highly regulated by the White Council. Dwarves can earn a hefty purse working these mines.

The White Knights

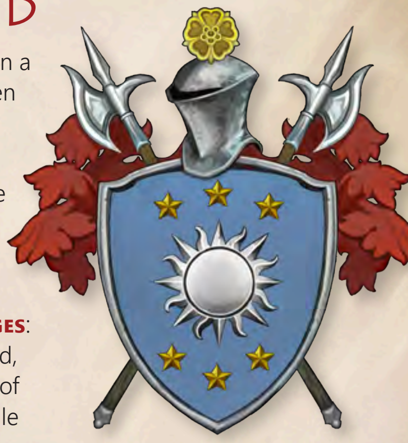
The elite cavaliers of the White Knights hold mysterious sway over the mages of Bemmea. The mages swear an oath to the knights that bind them, one wizard to one knight. Some speculate that this is repayment for the knights destroying Zhergthoth before it could crush Bemmea.

Recently, the contract binding the White Knights to the mages has been weakening (see "Betrayal of the White Knights," page 234). Daiquianis Exalter's desertion was followed by others, leaving just 250 armor-bonded knights. The new Master of the Armor Bonded, Tellanis Yazaron, is loyal to the duke and watches the other mages carefully for signs of treachery.

Within the city, the White Knights enforce order and ensure the polished veneer remains unblemished. Many citizens have seen knights appearing in a flash of arcane fire to enforce laws the people didn't know they were breaking (typically discussions on the secrets of perfumery), but most common folk will not recount such encounters, since they are not allowed to talk perfumery on pain of death. Though knights impose the duchy's laws in the sprawling farms, fields, and estates of the White Counts, their enforcement is somewhat laxer beyond the city's walls.

The knights accompany important caravans, especially perfume shipments, along trade routes to Barsella or Verrayne. They rarely patrol into the Wastes, however,

GRAND DUCHY OF BOURGUND



Symbol: A white sun on a blue field, with golden stars

Rulers: Duke Ignatius Martenne II (LN male human paladin 4) and the Council of White Counts

Important Personages: Count Otwin Horsfeld, Master of the Order of Rose Knights (LN male human); Tellanis Yazaron, Master of the Armor Bonded (LN male human); Lethana, High Priestess of Marena, Leader of the Shrouds (LE female human); Sir Markus Alavaine of the Order of Rose Knights (LN male human)

Population: 41,300 (40,000 humans, 500 dwarves, 500 halflings, 300 elves)

Capital: Bourgund, population 13,000 (12,000 humans, 500 dwarves, 300 elves, 200 halflings)

Castle: Elserin

Great Gods: Ailuros (patron, Bastet), Ceres, Lada, Mavros, Valeresh

Trade Goods: Banking and finance, grain, horses, mithral, perfume since the remaining armor-bonded knights can still rely on the scrying wizards of Mageholme to teleport them to any threat, including any who too closely approach the slumbering Dread Walkers.

The years of reliance on magical aid has bred complacency among the knights, making them softer than their hardened kin who felled Zhergthoth with valor and raw steel. Most knights are more learned in courtly intrigue than martial matters. With the armor bonds fading, the knights will be woefully unprepared for the looming threats of the undead giants in the Haunted Lands or the rumored dragons in the Ghostlight Forest. This situation is a grave concern to the White Council, if not yet to the duke himself.

MAGEHOLME CITADEL

The true power behind the White Knights resides in the secluded tower of Mageholme. Within its walls, 250 wizards live shackled in service to the White Knights. The majority of its residents are trained armor-bound mages, their fealty pledged to a White Knight and their time spent closely observing that knight. A few dozen elders serve as mentors, advisers, and court mages to the White Council. The remainder are apprentices culled from the least worthy of Bemmea's various schools. In Bourgund, however, they are mages of service and worth. The skills learned within Mageholme are carefully guarded state secrets.

High walls and magical wards protect the citadel against mundane and magical intrusion. The highest spires hold the scrying cells of the bonded mages on duty, each comfortably appointed to the wizard's taste. Most mages learn both arcane and divine arts, and many achieve the title of Mystic Theurge before retirement.

AURGELMIR'S TEETH

Scattered around the city are a dozen huge monoliths of crimson stone. The biggest, known as the Centerstone, stands in the Grand Plaza in front of the duke's palace. Unknown to the founders of Bourgund who built their city around them, these stones are the sleeping forms of primordial giants created by Aurgelmir, the first and greatest giant, and imprisoned by the gods. The task of ensuring these prisoners remain forever within their stone cages rests with the Shrouds, a secret cult of the Red Sisters of Marena, who perform a ritual every 10 years to renew the wards that keep the giants contained.

A few years ago, Sir Markus Alavaine, youngest of the White Knights' elite Order of the Rose, nearly unleashed disaster on the city. Sir Markus wanted to match the prowess of the White Knights of old who slew the Dread Walker Zhergthoth, and he convinced his superiors to let him bring down the red monoliths and deal with the threat of the giants once and for all. The foolish knight and his troops stopped the Shrouds from performing their rituals at the monoliths, thus allowing several giants to escape their prisons and rampage through the Grand Plaza. Fortunately, a group of adventurers joined forces with High Priestess Lethana and the other Shrouds. These brave heroes held back the giants long enough for one of the Red Sisters to renew the binding spell, cutting her own throat so the power of her blood forced them back into the monoliths. Sir Markus was demoted for exceeding his authority following the incident, and he still broods bitterly about his disgrace to this day.

THE DUCAL PERFUMERIES

The most exclusive district of Bourgund is the Bouquet District—or Odor Alley, in the whispered humor of the locals. Several streets host small incense shops and large perfume emporiums alike. The White Knights guard this precious resource closely, and the sensual fragrances escaping onto the pristine streets contrast oddly with the heavily armored knights.

Halflings are common in this district, desirable for their sensitive noses, devotion, and skill. Shadow elves also frequent the area, arranging shipments to the courts and spreading around large amounts of fey coin. Merchants here also provide other accoutrements, including delicate glass bottles, magical censers, and even more nefarious items that can serve dual purposes, such as rings holding small, secret compartments that work equally well for perfume or poison.

MAGOCRACY OF ALLAIN

In the aftermath of the Great Mage Wars, only the Magocracy of Allain stood among the ashes. Allain's vast holdings are bordered to the south by gleaming Bourgund, to the northeast by fey-plagued Tintager, to the west by Maillon's swamps, and finally crowned in the north by the shining jewel of Bemmea. Through happenstance or (more likely) treachery, Allain inherited the convergences of ley lines that once crisscrossed the Wastes. The paths, stretched and anchored by the isolated capital of Bemmea, make these lands an over-boiling kettle of magical might that travelers claim they can smell on the air like an approaching storm. As a result, arcanists of all stripes fill this land like rats in a granary.

Some come to Allain to learn from the most talented arcane practitioners in Midgard. Others come to steal power for themselves. Both kinds of travelers find ample opportunities. In Maillon, masters of alchemy struggle in their laboratories to invent new concoctions and unlock the secrets of immortality. Tintager recruits war mages, warlocks, and hellblood-tainted sorcerers to tame the fey wilderness and hold its ancient rivals at bay. In the fertile hinterlands, potent ley lines give rise to new mages, and experienced masters search among nobles and rabble alike for young apprentices to mold. In Bemmea, the great seat of magical might, strange and distorted archmages dwell and teach, the last survivors of the Great Mage Wars. Some seek to undo the damage, while others teach and warn less-cautious newcomers against restarting the rampage of long ago.

MAGOCRACY OF ALLAIN

Symbol: An intricate circle glyph orbited by 9 stars

Rulers: Exarch Vermes II (LE male tiefling wizard 20) and the Ninemage Council

Important Personages: Elder Arch Kallimachus (N male human); Feywarden Second Prime Cothwidden (LN male tiefling); Teth Rangeska (CN female human); Malkot Ebonstaff (LN male human); Jacen the Paper Master (LG male human); High Savant-Priest Argess Airgead the Silver Feathered (N female human); Erramun the Sleepless (NE male tiefling); Feywarden Marriot Splitleaf (LN male tiefling); Andress the Ageless (CN male human)

Population: 248,000 (221,000 humans, 20,000 tieflings, 6,000 gnomes, 1,000 minotaurs)

Capital: Bemmea, population 28,500 (24,000 humans, 3,000 tieflings, 1,000 gnomes, 500 halflings)

Cities: Maillon, population 21,000; Tintager, population 16,000; Cassadega, population 12,000; Smolderheim, population 6,500

Towns: Cuculla, population 2,500; Sagefall, population 1,740, Fellmire 930

Castle: Echlin

Great Gods: Thoth-Hermes (patron), Hecate, Sarastra, Veles, Wotan

Trade Goods: Alchemical woods, cold iron weapons, potions and other magical items, vril technology, light stones

The people of Allain are a strange lot. Even common folk carry an unusual knowledge of the magical arts and display curiosity, rather than fear, at the appearance of the unknown. Some attribute this to the demon blood that historically taints the people of this region, along with some commoners' sharp, clawlike nails or unexplained immunity to fire. The people are used to the baying of invisible hounds in the distance, sniffing out transgressors of the land's bizarre laws or tracking children with magical talent so they can be properly trained. Magic is both powerful and commonplace here.

Surrounded by open ocean, inhospitable wastes and forest wilderness, Allain is remote. The region nevertheless attracts visitors and adventurers of all stripes. Merchants come for the magically crafted wares of apprentices (often flawed but offered at steep discounts), the cold iron weapons of Tintager, Bemmean scrolls, and the unique elixirs and hardwoods of Maillon. Everything can be had for a price, but the haggling is not always over gold.

GOVERNMENT

The looming spire that houses the Council of Caelmarath—never renamed after the fall of that ancient empire—rises from atop the towering highlands of the Bemmean peninsula at the terminus of the long Mage Road. From here, nine archmages of unfathomable power rule Allain. Arcanists from the cities of Tintager, Maillon, and Cassadega each hold a representative seat on the Ninemage Council, and another represents the combined hinterlands and wilds of the territories. Bemmean wizards and sorcerers loyal to the exarch hold the remaining five seats, reflecting that city's dominance. One empty uncounted seat is retained for Vael Turog, Caelmarath's ancient ally.

Within the Spire Perilous, the mages scheme and plot in an ancient dance of unusual rules, obscure transgressions, and bizarre rituals. Old Elder Arch Kallimachus remains here, dragged down by the weight of dozens of vril artifact recovered in his city of Cassadega and always at odds with the stubborn, vacant stare of Second Prime Cothwidden, the grizzled Feywarden and general of Tintager's war mage academies. Teth Rangeska represents Maillon. An acrid-stench clings to her stained robes, and she hides her badly scarred face beneath the shadows of her hood at all times. She spends most council meetings scribbling formulae in her journal. Malkot Ebonstaff, a cantankerou and paranoid old wizard from Smolderheim, regularly brings "new and disturbing evidence"—usually just unsubstantiated rumors—of ink magic being practiced in secret before the council.

Rebuilt following its destruction in the Great Mage Wars, the fortress of Echlin on the edge of the Western Wilderness is the seat of power of the archmage Thelosiphus Duchang, who represents the wilds of Allain on the Ninemage Council. Duchang and his apprentices are not averse to testing out new magic on any dust goblins or other creatures that come too close to their tower.

Over them all looms Exarch Vermes II, one of the most influential and mysterious figures in a city riddled with mysteries. Rumors swirl around the ancient wizard. Some claim he is the last pureblooded Ankeshelian. Others call him a true half-demon bred from Caelmarath royalty. Old stories hold that beneath his face-shrouding robes is a writhing inhuman form. Despite such conjecture, no one disputes his power and influence, and the wizard has molded Bemmea for centuries into the city it is today.

The exarch played a vital role in the magocracy's recovery after the Great Mage Wars, and things in the Wasted West would be far more horrific if not for his efforts.

Outside the cities, life for the average citizen is much the same as anywhere in Midgard. Farmland is fertile west of the Leukos River, with farming communities spread out across Allain. Most villages have an appointed overseer, a spellcaster of no insignificant talent, with a small retinue of town guards to keep the peace. Traveling courts with skilled diviners arrive in hinterland towns once every season to try cases and dispense justice, and their action is swift and severe. Travelers unfamiliar with the laws and traditions of the land must tread carefully since the unscrupulous take advantage of centuries of accumulated laws to manipulate the ignorant.

Punishment varies according to the crime but is characteristically harsh. Imprisonment is common, as is gibbeting of the living in cold iron cages at major crossroads along the Mage Road. Spellcasters convicted of serious crimes serve their sentence among Tintager's Feywardens. Young and impressionable apprentices are forced to pledge service to Bourgund and sacrifice their freedom among the armor bonded.

Laws of the Magocracy

In Allain they have a saying: "No law is ever unwritten." Centuries of accumulated pacts, martial codes, constitutions, ordinances, and civil codes remain on the books for use or abuse by the clever and manipulative. Enforcement of frivolous laws rarely happens, though incautious travelers, especially in the larger cities, can find themselves arrested and tried for such bizarre acts as drinking curative potions in the gray light of dusk or dawn (Code Exarch IV.XI.VV) or using palindromes in common speech (Third Prime Ordinance XVI.V). The laws made sense once, but most have passed beyond all usefulness except to those bent on revenge or foul play. Enforcing these outdated codes is something of a cottage industry in Bemmea and Maillon among mages unsuccessful at other endeavors. The fines and bribes to avoid prosecution can provide a decent income.

The more common laws can also cause trouble for ignorant transgressors. Assaults against arcane spellcasters by those unable to wield arcane magic are punishable by up to a year of servitude to the offended party, enforced with a *geas*. Since the law dictates that only the living can defend themselves in such instances, nonspellcasters should finish what they start. The laws of the land are varied and capricious, and GMs are encouraged to use their imaginations when PCs travel this region.

Mages and Magic in Allain

None take magic more seriously that the mages of Allain. Spellcasters wander these lands in greater numbers than elsewhere, but most outsiders notice little difference. A faint scent of ozone hangs in the air, and many mysteriously hooded wanderers beckon from the dark corners of inns and taverns, but otherwise the lands and cities themselves show little obviously magical character. Only rarely does the mundane curtain pull back, in sites such as the Bottle Market of Maillon, with its brimming stalls and bubbling elixirs; the soaring heights of Bemmea's Academies of High Arcana; the vril artifacts on display in shops of Cassadega; or the humming standing stones ringed with cold-iron golems along Tintager's border.

Instead, the wizards of Allain walk unseen. Popular opinion attributes this to the physical distortions that derive from years of magical practice over such a concentration of ley lines. Older arcanists in the region barely resemble humans. Many carry a residual taint of the Realms Beyond from when they trafficked with beings from that now-forbidden realm. Others carry the blood of demons or devils, or they consort with twisted beings that offer power for the price of a true love's whisper or the nemory of the smell of fresh-cut grass.

Some veil themselves in illusion, but many rely on eep-hooded cloaks to conceal far too many eyes or rithing hair of puckered tentacles. With teleportation as ommonplace as breathing and the power to paralyze a oe's lungs or inscribe their flesh with glyphs of everlasting pain, the wizards of Allain can be cruel, callous, and dismissive of those around them. Their reputation precedes them in foreign lands. Bemmean wizards are nearly universally shunned for the devastation wrought by them or their colleagues. Still, others welcome them when they offer their patronage or riches in return for simple favors. Caution is advised to those who consider such bargains—if they have a choice in the matter.

Forbidden Arts

Not all magic is accepted in these lands. Ink magic, in particular, has been outlawed for some 90 years, since an incident known as the "Hakren affair" exposed the dangers of this previously obscure magic. At that time, a cabal of demon-influenced scribes called the Verses conspired to assassinate their master. They created enchanted ink and words that turned against the mage and strangled him. Their success, and subsequent service to rival mages on the Ninemage Council, led to the slaying of over half the former council by profane glyph magic. The exarch's divinations exposed the perpetrators, and they burned in arcane fire.

Since then, scriveners—as ink mages are commonly known—are spoken of only in hushed tones. However, evidence of a thriving cult to Totivillus, the Archduke of Scribes, leads authorities to suspect that the grip of ink magic is more pervasive than previously thought.

Necromancy is also frowned upon, and legal protections in Allain purposefully exclude those who deal in dead flesh. Though not expressly illegal, necromancy is neither condoned nor promoted, and many mages disparage its practitioners even while dealing with devils and worse. Undead, while neither accepted or protected, are ignored, and some mages choose that lifeless state. More than one member of the Ninemage Council has indulged in magic that preserves the soul while desiccating the flesh.

Bemmea

Bemmea perches on an isolated granite base connected to the mainland at low tide by a long sliver of land. The mages of Bemmea don't reveal when the tide changes since their
mastery of the elements is complet
city by land is controlled by their w
of most Midgard cities, Bemmea is
but towers from ancient foundatio
impossible heights. The peninsula i
much larger ancient city smashed b
of years ago. Winding streets reach
all manner of fraternal houses, acad
institutes of private tutelage, lodge
remains of towers still protrude fro
for an unsuitable harbor but still us
colleges, accessible either by bridge

Bemmea hosts a cloistered comm
masters, hopeful apprentices, and t
Visitors are discouraged, and many
disdain nonspellcasters. Colleges o
Academies Arcana or the Librariun
limits to anyone not a teacher, visit
Knowledge and secrets are the prin
citizens guard both well. Travelers a
of a militia or town guard, only to d
that the city doesn't need them. Wa
from pools, fountains, and gutters,
elementals rumble up from the stre
criminals. Visitors remark that "eve
and it might not be far from the tru

Apart from such disturbances, B
fantastic at first glance. Soaring bri
spires-within-spires are incredible
than magical constructs. Even the c
obviously display power, though th
carriage, flying carpet, or plodding
mages make their way through the
ozone scent of Allain is noticeably s
stings the nostrils of those unused t
above do the intricately curved, gly
anchors for the city's powerful ley l

Commerce in Bemmea primarily
competing academies, their staff, a
Though rumors of vast markets of
goods are unfounded, magic can be
acquired cheaply when one knows v
to look. Most bargains consist of apprentice magic, class projects, and poorly graded graduate experiments. Rumors persist of dark markets deep in the flooded bowels of the city where buyers can procure experimental cast-offs, stolen magic, and mostly functioning golems. No one is sure how these goods escape the prying eyes of divining authorities to reach the markets, but buyers must take care both in their acquisitions and in revealing their purchases.

Though not encouraged, travelers can find several reasonable options for rooms and hospitality. Popular taverns include the Elves-in-Irons and the Skull Bowl, and safe lodging can be found at the Great Old Oven as well as the Mortar 'n' Pestle. Outsiders should choose their bed and board carefully, lest they attract the wrong

Academies Arcana

Bemmea houses dozens of arcane academies, from the sprawling campus of the council-run Academies Arcana to small, private classrooms and single-student tutors like those of Blackspike or Hightower. Most students begin academic life between ages 12 and 14, and they can apprentice for up to a decade. During the first lean and unsatisfying years, students perform meaningless chores that might or might not profit them in later arcane study, depending as much on the apprentice's mindset as the instructor. Promising or particularly bright students quickly rise above such endeavors and soon move to private studies to discover their talents and inclinations. Students commonly transfer from tutor to tutor to find acceptance or a mentor in their specialty.

Student life varies but is mostly a tedious academic affair with long periods in quiet libraries among musty tomes only rarely punctuated by hands-on application. Due to the power of Bemmea's ley lines, student spellcasting is strictly monitored by master mages and their assistants. Public displays of power are discouraged, and rivalries among students require the utmost discretion. The Ninemage Council would rather see a promising child dead than expelled with incomplete and dangerous knowledge. There are exceptions to these dry and quiet rules. Jacen the Paper Master, for example, lectures his students on busy street corners, mystifying onlookers with his control of lifelike paper constructs.

Many students stay in Bemmea to become master mages, researchers, or artificers. Facilities such as the Planteria Observatorium, a huge indoor orrery that tracks the shifting constellations, or the Invisible Halls, the academy of glamours accessible only by those granted charms by the dean, attract life-long students who seek to hone their craft in a familiar environment. The Librarium Caelmarath always needs more magical scribes and translators in the endless effort to organize its vast holdings. Residents enjoy a busy social season, with exclusive lodges, fraternities, secret societies, and other distractions. Such organizations include the mysterious Obscured, the Guild of Honest Inkers and Sanctioned Sigilists, the Sons of Vael Turog, the Church Arcane and Universal, and the pranksters of the Affiliation of Unaffiliated Wizards.

For those interested in leaving Bemmea's hallowed halls, entry into the fraternity of arcanists can occur in as little as a decade; their title is "master mage" if they are accepted into the guild, "apprentice" or "journeyman mage" for those who continue their studies. Most newly inted mages find themselves thrust into the open world ith a handshake and little else by the age of 25, several ears older than colleagues who sought open roads and ark dungeons instead of formal education. Master ages in good standing find that their teachers, fellow pprentices, and librarians leave open opportunities for them to return to Bemmea, but these offers rarely last beyond a few years. Bemmea's powerful know how swiftly those who pursue dangerous knowledge outside the magocracy's institutions can rise in power, and no one wants to encourage potential competition.

Sons of Vael Turog

Most of the fraternities of the Academies Arcana are little more than an excuse for like-minded scholars to socialize and overindulge in alcohol under the guise of a shared interest in arcane matters. The Sons of Vael Turog are different. This group of very bright and bookish apprentice wizards have no time for excessive drinking or student pranks. Instead, they spend their free time among the dusty volumes of the Librarium Caelmarath, deep in study. They are obsessed with the magical plagues created by the mages of Vael Turog during the Mage Wars, and seek to rediscover the lost formulae as a means of keeping Bemmea safe from enemy wizards.

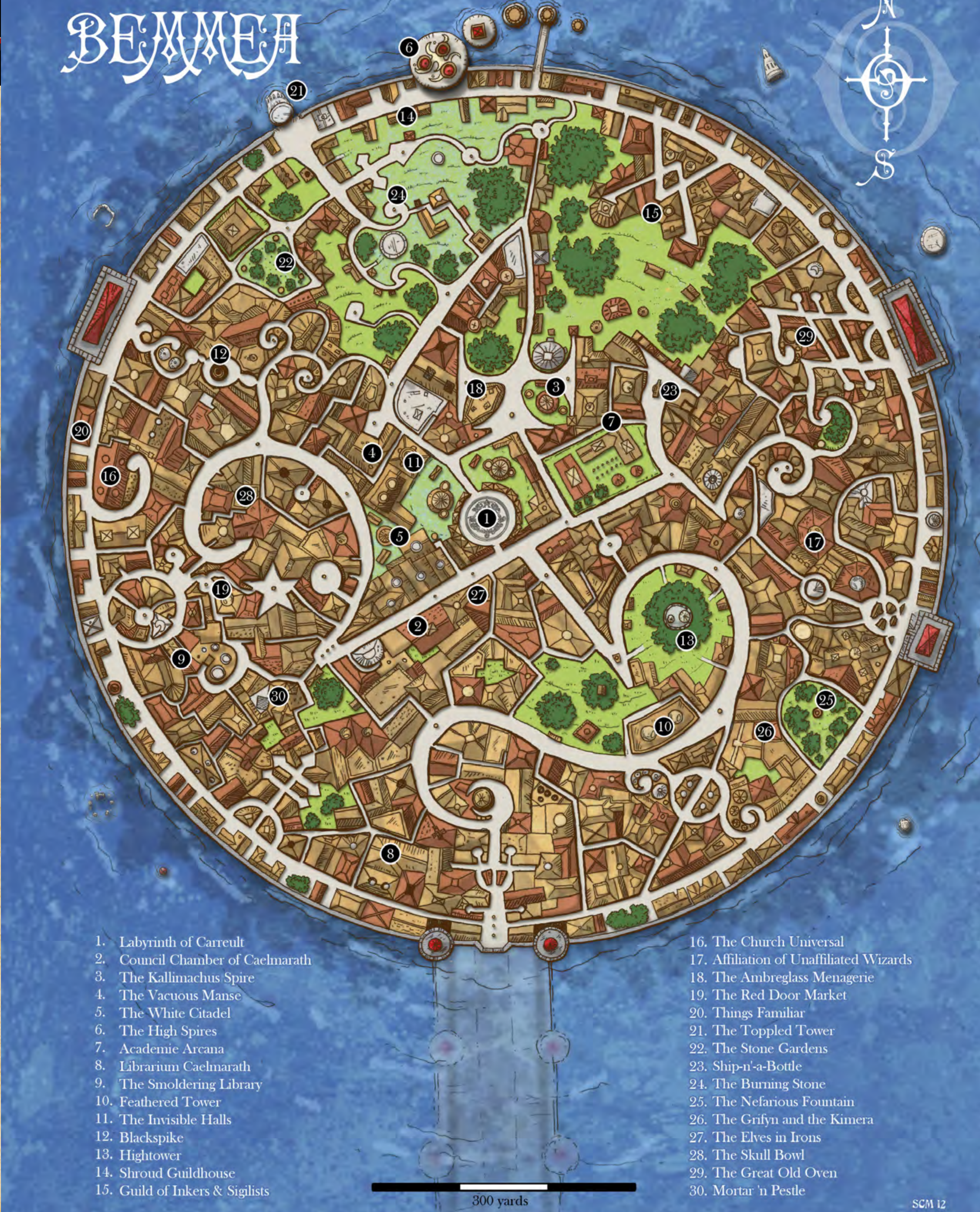
The leader of the Sons is Grendil Quebbin (CE male human wizard 8 [mage]), the son of a wealthy noble who sits on Bourgund's White Council. Grendil is tall and gaunt with lank black hair and pale skin from spending nearly all his waking hours indoors. He is planning an expedition to the ruins of Vael Turog (see page 240), funded by his father's riches, to uncover the laboratories buried beneath the city and learn the mages' secrets. He hasn't told his brothers his real plan—to unleash a plague in the Academies Arcana and wipe out all those mages who bullied him.

Streets of Bemmea

The magic flitting through Bemmea's streets is more subtle than legends portray, though keen-eyed visitors sometimes catch glimpses of the wonders that occur behind closed doors and high academy walls. The more obvious displays of eldritch influence include the following.

The Ambreglass Menagerie: The Antavien family maintains an extensive creature collection from across Midgard, all encased in their signature ambreglass suspension. The fantastic creatures are on public display in a beautiful rooftop terrace garden. The family eagerly trades in components such as manticore manes and owlbear feathers, but only for exotic specimens to add to their collection.

The Arcane Armada: Smashed remnants of the Great Mage Wars, these glyphships stand wrecked and strewn about the submerged towers that surround Bemmea, and rumors of magical riches within the massive vessels attract salvagers and fugitives alike. Sharks, giant octopuses, and



1. Labyrinth of Carreult
2. Council Chamber of Caelmarath
3. The Kallimachus Spire
4. The Vacuous Manse
5. The White Citadel
6. The High Spires
7. Academie Arcana
8. Librarium Caelmarath
9. The Smoldering Library
10. Feathered Tower
11. The Invisible Halls
12. Blackspike
13. Hightower
14. Shroud Guildhouse
15. Guild of Inkers & Sigilists
16. The Church Universal
17. Affiliation of Unaffiliated Wizards
18. The Ambreglass Menagerie
19. The Red Door Market
20. Things Familiar
21. The Toppled Tower
22. The Stone Gardens
23. Ship-n'-a-Bottle
24. The Burning Stone
25. The Nefarious Fountain
26. The Grifyn and the Kimera
27. The Elves in Irons
28. The Skull Bowl
29. The Great Old Oven
30. Mortar 'n Pestle

other dangerous creatures lurk among the ruined ships, and centuries of plunder have made the picking bare indeed. The brave and the desperate, however, ride out to them in hope of discovering some powerful weapon thought lost to the ages.

Feathered Tower: The temple-library of Thoth-Hermes floats a few feet above street level, a strangely silvered and metallic spire that serves as home for the priests of the Wise God and as an unofficial home for the Blue Wands mercenary company.

The Grifyn and the Kimera: This ancient tavern is frequented by conjurers, callers, and summoners of all stripes who nightly set summoned creatures against one another in the tavern's central pit. Many gold pieces, potions, and scrolls change hands after each match. Lately, a cowled wizard named Zathron Trellek (NE male tiefling wizard 9) has dominated the competition.

Labyrinth of Carreult: Nestled within the city's center is an intricate mosaic labyrinth 100 feet across set into the cobblestone and surrounded by a short wall. Locals claim those who flawlessly navigate the convoluted, ever-changing maze-pattern are magically shunted along the ley lines to wherever they wish on Midgard, with the notable exception of the Western Wastes. Spellcasters find that within the maze, all other magic falls dead. As a result, many bloody duels are settled here by staff and fists, especially between mages who cannot risk punishment for magical combat or between those of vastly differing power.

Red Door Market: Bemmea's most notorious dealer in enchanted items lives behind a single red door that changes location every day. If visitors find it and pass the scrutiny of Ivlysse (CE male tiefling bard 7) , a deceptively wizened old man who guards the portal, they enter a wondrous extra-dimensional bazaar filled to bursting with exotic spell components, fabulous spices, intoxicating incenses, and Maillonian elixirs. The disturbingly friendly lich, Osvaud the Off-White, runs the Red Door Market and is renowned as one of Bemmea's few honest purveyors of enchanted weapons and armor. The ivory-boned, chatty lich also displays vril artifacts and stolen fey baubles, all for sale at the right price.

Smoldering Library: In darker days, this building held vile, tainted lore. Many blamed the appearance of the Dread Walkers on tomes from this archive. As a result, the library and its blasphemous contents were put to the torch. Though the arson happened 300 years ago, the arcane fire has never gone out. To this day, noxious embers still smolder within the blackened walls. Some claim the vaults below remained unharmed by the magical blaze, though foolhardy explorers never return. Their ghosts linger among the acrid smoke and crumbling walls.

Things Familiar: This shop maintains pure bloodlines of the famous familiars of legendary mages. Buyers can examine cages of the nest owls, rats, ravens, weasels, and toads. They can visit potential familiars in the underground cavern where the famous Rothslinger bats roost, and even communicate with prospective purchases through the gnome proprietor, Bixby Barnum (NG male gnome druid 6). Bixby maintains a full stock of vermin familiars for warlocks, though their pedigree is somewhat suspect by comparison. Prices start at over 200 gp even for bloodlines of markedly lower prestige, but all familiars purchased here have a +1 to their Intelligence score.

TINTAGER, THE IRON METROPOLIS

The city of Tintager stands on the site of the last surviving Feyward—a series of ancient human watch posts marking the border of the magocracies along the Leukos River—that guard against the intrusion of the Arbonesse elves. To the east, the Old Road to Salzbach bulges awkwardly around the pockmarked lands that mark the border between nations, lands that have never recovered. The city's entire purpose is to guard against the elven threat to Allain's sovereignty, though its walls of cold iron and stone have not seen an elven army in more than 400 years.

High, concentric walls around the original stone keep trace centuries of growth. Despite the gray stone landscape, the city appears green and fertile, with trees and gardens. As one approaches, however, the startling truth becomes obvious. Not a single seed sprouts from the hard soil of the city. Instead, the greenery consists of the verdigrised, bladed leaves of the cold iron feyward trees, smelted and formed in imitation of the towering oaks of the Arbonesse. These constructs supposedly counter elven enchantments and animate to attack the fey.

In many ways, Tintager is the dark twin of Bourgund. The Feywardens have remained on high alert against a threat that hasn't materialized for decades yet which still looms on the horizon at the edge of the Arbonesse. Trained by the hardened sergeant-at-arms Feywarden Marriot Splitleaf, the rough eldritch warriors and sorcerers of Tintager have little use for the dainty perfumes and banners of their southern cousins.

Tintager accepts all who come to serve. Its forces host many of Allain's outcast children—devil-blooded tieflings—who find less acceptance elsewhere. Soldiers carrying the faint hint of sulfur or horned and fanged war mages are a common sight, alongside violent fleshwarpers, outcast summoners, and even pardoned ink mages. Many are culled from the ranks of Bemmea's failed apprentices and hardened in conflict with creatures of the Wastes or—rarely—small elven parties in the Arbonesse.

Everywhere glints the tarnished edge of cold iron weapons, armor, and even entire walls. For centuries, things on the border remained tense, with the inhabitants acting as if the enemy were at the city gates, while the barren fields and wide stretch of the Leukos remained quiet, and only the rustle of thick leaves sounded from the dark elven forest beyond the river. Now, the rituals are mostly empty ones.

Despite this, the Feywardens have sent regular raiding parties into the Arbonesse to claim decades-old bounties on elven outlaws, test elven defenses, or hunt. Less frequently, anxious regiments led by druids sympathetic to Allain such as Raxier Barktongue (LN male tiefling druid 8) cut down entire groves and shipped their trunks to Maillon for alchemical preparation, an act of war that the elves seemed surprisingly reluctant to retaliate against. Other excursions involved adventurers and mercenaries sent to gather rare wood and sap or to awaken trees, sometimes even introducing parasites or infections that attack the forest.

Despite these provocations, Tintager's Feywardens still cast the elves as the aggressors. Defensive conflicts were many while counterattacks from the forest were rare. Many speculated that the humans' aggression was encouraged by a dark influence seeking something within the Arbonesse, and perhaps the Tintager's cold iron defenses and its standing stones both warded off the fey and restrained some diabolical influence within.

That theory could well be proved true. A few months ago everything changed when cultists from the Black Goat's Flock opened a rift to the Realms Beyond (see "A New Walker," page 233). The resulting influx of eldritch energy damaged both the wards protecting Tintager from the forest, and the ancient elven wards safeguarding the fey from the magocracy. As the magical safeguards crumbled, the terrifying form of the Walker known as Y'gurdraketh appeared on the outskirts of the forest.

Y'gurdraketh, Scion of the Great Void

Those mages brave enough to have approached the abomination believe it to be a servant of the Goat of the Woods, perhaps one of her Dark Young. Certainly there is a close resemblance to the flame-scourged scions that guard the Mother's Grove in the Ghostlight Forest, though Y'gurdraketh shows no signs of burn marks.

The appearance of this new Walker has spurred the Feywardens and the elves of the Arbonesse into action. Both sides have dispatched patrols to keep the creature under observation without getting too close. The Feywardens and the elves both think the other side was behind Y'gurdraketh's appearance, and as a result there have been more skirmishes between the war mages and the elves in the last few weeks than there were in the last year.

So far, Y'gurdraketh has wandered northwest slowly through the forest, following the course of the Leukos River toward Cassadega, before turning round and looping back toward the south again. Upon reaching a large grove of trees surrounding an ancient moss-covered stone monolith, the Walker stopped. It annihilated two groups of elven scouts and one cadre of tiefling eldritch knights who came too close without suffering any harm from its attackers. Y'gurdraketh has remained in the grove for several weeks, apparently waiting for something or someone. Cultists have already offered it sacrifices and begun rituals to propitiate it.

Maillon

Before the Great Mage Wars, Bemmea hosted a famed alchemical market where travelers acquired all manner of potions and elixirs. As the market grew, however, so too did the pervasive stench from the brewers and distillers. The toxic stink hung low on Bemmean streets like an oppressive pall. In the upheaval and distraction of the war, the Ninemage Council banned the trade. They teleported the entire alchemical district—buildings, alchemists, and all—into the nearby marshlands.

For their part, the alchemists squinted over their bottles and stills, shrugged, and got back to work. They found that exotic specimens thrived within the swamp, giving them access to a wealth of raw materials. Over time, the city's misplaced center of ancient stone sank, and its flooded lowest streets created waterlogged havens for smugglers, fugitives, outcasts, and monsters. The alchemists expanded by tacking on wooden shanties and thatch-roofed huts wherever they could.

A chaotic crisscrossing of boardwalks and wooden bridges sprang up to connect the growing networks of shacks, workshops, and homes that rose from the swamp's murky water on stilted supports. The expansion continues. Hundreds of residents live in boats and gondolas, and many labs and homes are hidden in mired ships that have been moved inland and grounded in the swamps.

The alchemists of Maillon are a fruitful, prosperous lot. Chemists wander the swamps on high wooden stilts, collecting strange plants and outlandish ingredients. Their unchecked experimentation has had drastic consequences. Poisonous gasses belch from small potion-mills. Alchemists pour waste from their brewing processes into the waters below, souring the swamplands. This creates strange personages like the marsh menace Orogoth (CE male hill giant), a mutated giant with webbed feet and bulbous eyes capable of casting sorcerer spells, whose intellect has doubled after long exposure to alchemical residues. The foul waters are inhabited by alchemical oozes, castoff experiments, and living chemical runoff that warps the wildlife nearby, resulting in creatures such as owlbears and manticores. But adventurers need exotic elixirs, drugs, and healing potions, so Bemmea's ramshackle half-cousin thrives, even as it falls apart at the seams and sinks farther into the middle of the stinking swamp.

Overseeing the chaos is the human alchemist Andress the Ageless, the eternally young leader of the Guild of Master Chemysts. Most meeting Andress mistake him for a child prodigy, though he has held his post for 50 years. Some attribute this to a secret cache of age-defying potions while others believe he has discovered the alchemist's ultimate prize—eternal youth. Some think he paid too high a price for this knowledge. They worry that the aloof, golden-eyed guild master is slowly changing into something altogether inhuman. For now, Andress wanders his city, hands calmly clasped behind his golden robes, with his young face beaming at each new discovery.

THE BOTTLE MARKET

Perhaps nowhere in Midgard does the phrase "let the buyer beware" ring more true than the cramped stalls and overflowing booths of Maillon's Bottle Market. Sprawling boardwalks connect this tangle of shops and tents. Within the chaos, buyers are as likely to find reliable sellers as they are to discover dangerous dabblers, opportunistic scoundrels, or snake-oil peddlers. Sellers such as the ever-elusive Meriam Jaye (NE female shadow fey rogue 6) dabble in second-rate elixirs and even tainted drugs. Booth rents are cheap, and the growing senility of Market Warden Gray Sorock (NG male dwarf wizard 7) adds to the district's lax reputation. Buyers can find or commission nearly any exotic elixir or powerful potion, but the talented and the unscrupulous alike hawk their wares from this crowded bazaar, and the distinction between them is increasingly as unclear as the mud under the boardwalk.

Regardless of their maker, potions brewed in Maillon have an inconsistent reputation. For some, they are the bane of reliable craftsmanship, and purchasers find themselves in tight spots when potions do not perform or have unusual results. To others, the elixirs provide the luxury of portable magic they could not otherwise afford. Locals are quick to point out the giant alembics hovering in the old city center—the region's only clean water distillery. Pure water is an expensive luxury most brewers cannot afford in the cutthroat commerce of the Bottle Market.

Several talented brewers in the Bottle Market have excellent reputations if one can circumvent the squawking ballyhoo to discover them. Channy Four-Fires (N female tiefling wizard 6/cleric 3 [Thoth-Hermes]) is a reliable brewer who has perfected the condensing of *potions of healing* into small flavored lozenges, safer than bottles from spills or an unlucky fall. The overstuffed shelves of Blightward's Smorgasbord, run by a diminutive gnome named Listra Sparks, offer potions at a 10% premium but are guaranteed free of taint. Some specialist breweries have devout followings, such as the Starbrow Brewers, whose *potions of healing* always heal the maximum amount of hit points (a carefully guarded trade secret) or the Changelings who produce double-duration *potions of diminution and growth*.

STROSS LABORATORY

Over 600 years ago, Abderus Stross became the first merchant of Zobeck to form a close connection to the mages of Bemmea, serving as apprentice to Exarch Salatis, an archmage of long years and deep mystic understanding. When Abderus returned to the Free City of Zobeck with a shadow fey courtesan on his arm, House Stross changed forever, dividing into loyal followers of the sun god Khors and those eager to dabble in the mystic arts offered by the shadow fey, demons, and worse. Following the Great Mage Wars, the latter members of House Stross became obsessed with recovering the lost lore of the West, particularly orichalcum and vril technology, and sponsored expeditions into the Wastes to obtain such items.

To keep her discoveries away from the watching eyes of the mages of Bemmea, Palatina Stross, a raven-haired wizard and alchemist with shadow fey blood, established a laboratory here in Maillon. Abandoned when House Stross fell 90 years ago, the rotting structure lies half-sunk into the marshes at an angle and can only be reached by boat. Inside, the three-winged triskelion symbol of House Stross hangs over the collapsed staircase in the hallway, confirming the family's ownership. Exploring the flooded interior is challenging, but the basement still holds a few vril artifacts and other strange finds from the Wastes, as long as would-be explorers can overcome the pair of corrupting oozes or brain oozes lurking down there. In the master bedroom upstairs, Palatina's large ebony wardrobe holds a still-functioning one-way portal to the Stross Library in Castle Shadowcrag. This requires a portal key, which can be found hidden somewhere in the house.

LANDMARKS OF MAILLON

The marshes of Maillon blend smoothly into the boardwalks and stilt-houses of the town.

BELKER HALL: This tavern peddles no ale. Instead, elaborate smoking pipes line each table, and a thick curtain of smoke lingers in the air. Potions brewed especially for the pipes not only impart their magical effects on the smokers but also enhance their sense of the arcane. In addition to its normal effects, any potion ingested through the pipes grants a +2 to any Intelligence ability check made while under the potion's effects.

THE FELLMIRE: Just outside Maillon lies a vast swamp teeming with all manner of strange, mutated plant and animal life including froghemoths, three-eyed giant frogs, and basilisks whose gaze turns their victims into clouds of stinking green vapor. A small town, also called Fellmire, lies on the edge of the swamp and serves as a staging post for intrepid swamp explorers.

FLOODSHOP WELL: Clean water is among Maillon's rarest commodities, and the ruling Waterman's Guild strictly controls the pure water produced by the city's giant hovering alembics. When the only alternative is swamp water that carries an oily alchemical sheen or a faint green glow, any other source is hugely valuable. For the last several months, an enterprising rogue named Esme Deadhand (CG female human rogue 4) has made a fortune undercutting the guild with her access to a private well, its secret source being a basement workshop flooded by a decanter of endless water accident several years ago.

GLADIATORIAL PITS: The swamps of Maillon breed all sorts of aberrations and warped magical beasts, many of which the alchemists of the city collect to harvest their unique organs. But the alchemists of Maillon are nothing if not opportunistic, and captured creatures are pitted against one another in gladiatorial duels in the large lecture halls of the Guild of Master Chemysts.

Sputterwick Alley: A popular destination for sightseers in the Bottle Market, this crooked alley backs onto the homes of two bickering alchemists continually striving to out-do each other. As great as the deals are, what brings the curious around is the run-off that their apprentices constantly dump out of the back door, which over the years has freakishly mutated the local rats. Some have gained the power of speech and devious intelligence, while others display gruesome tentacles or organs on the outside of their bodies.

Alchemical Hardwood

Not all of the belching smoke and polluted water results in liquid magic. Several guilds in Maillon leech residual magic from alchemical runoff to enchant specially harvested hardwoods from the Ghostlight Forest. This material is perfect for making magical devices. Several of these items are listed here.

Corpsewood: The choicest cuts from certain decaying, gnarled trunks harvested deep within the Maillon Marsh are carved into wicked wands carrying motifs of bony fingers and skulls. While using a corpsewood wand as an arcane focus, a spellcaster gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls when casting a necromancy spell.

Dampwood: This rare magic wood has a spongy consistency and constantly sweats beads of water. Any shield made from dampwood weighs twice as much as a normal shield but grants the wielder resistance against fire attacks. The shield can absorb up to 50 hp fire damage before drying out and cracking, becoming useless.

Scroll Veneer: The barks of some trees growing along the polluted banks of Maillon's swamps enhance the magical properties of inks used in making scrolls. Pressed into thin sheets and used in place of parchment or vellum, scroll veneers make it easier to re-scribe the same spells on top of the residual inks from previous writing that never entirely fades. If a spell scroll is written on scroll veneer, a wizard is able to recreate the scroll once the spell has been cast, so it can be used a second time by following the same process (and paying the same cost in gp) for copying a spell into a spellbook.

Shrieking Plank: Local legends insist that those slain in the Ghostlight Forest forever inhabit the trees in that wood. True or not, talented mediums can select and harvest trees that react adversely to certain creatures—proof, they say, of the power of spirits over their murderers. A single shrieking plank can be incorporated into any room or wooden item weighing at least 10 pounds. Any single shrieking plank reacts adversely to creatures of a specific type. When a creature with the aberration, fey, fiend, or undead type approaches within 10 feet of a plank keyed to that type, the wood emits a piercing sound that lasts for 1d3 rounds and is audible within 100 feet. Shrieking planks cost 5 gp per pound.

Cassadega

The ancient Ankeshelians flourished for thousands of years as the first human civilization. Gifted this progress by their strange masters, the aboleths, the Ankeshelians also inherited an unearthly and primitive science-magic known as vril and became talented in the ways of glyph magic. These people eventually turned from their masters when they discovered the existence of the divine. Thus, perceived treachery and mankind's hubris corrupted this first great age. The aboleths brought the island nation low by summoning the Isonade to smash the traitors under its world-shattering tail.

The ruins of old Ankeshel lurked beneath the waves for thousands of years until portions of the once-great island nation became exposed along Allain's western coast. Changing waters revealed some ancient district of drowned ruins near the mouth of the Leukos River, where Tintager patrols first found them over 90 years ago. Scholars came soon afterward, and hundreds of savants, students, and diggers quietly settled among the ruins under the Feywardens' watchful gaze. The modern settlement called Cassadega sprung up around the ruins, a tacked-on town constructed before the nearby elves even knew of its presence.

Not long after Cassadega's founding, workers uncovered the submerged, treasure-filled tomb of the priest-king Thalassos IV, and with it the first operational vril battery to be seen in centuries. Rumors quickly spread of the lost secrets and powerful magic locked in the ruins, and the sleepy scholarly community exploded into a boomtown. Explorers, adventurers, and opportunistic thieves, all set on salvaging the riches and lost knowledge, flooded Cassadega within a month. Soon, the coastal merfolk revealed themselves and protected their sites by sabotaging worksites and slaughtering unguarded looters. The city's tempting riches soon seduced even them, however, and a tentative peace and trade treaty was established.

The elves of the Arbonesse would not be wooed so easily. Determined to stop vril technology from falling once again into irresponsible human hands, they raided the coastal villages. This stopped only when the powerful vril arc-cannons were restored to working order, and Tintager's Feywardens arrived to guard the reclaimed city.

Vril technology—that elusive, primitive magical force so naturally wielded by the ancient Ankeshelians—is highly prized. Examples of vril artifacts were not unknown in old Caelmarath, but the rise of Cassadega ushered in a new age of functioning vril weapons. The citizens are devoted to restoring the technology now that they have learned the secrets of the charged batteries that convert magical energy to give vril items power. The riches of Cassadega include other treasures, such as ancient glyph magic, golden jewelry, rare orichalcum ore, and—perhaps the single most valuable treasure of all—the secret key to decode the magically indecipherable Ankeshelian language.

Vril Technology

Examples of rediscovered vril technology run the gamut from powerful rifles that fire bursts of plasmalike energy to lightning-charged shields and armor and other unusual items. Although technological rather than magical, these items should be treated as rare in Cassadega and very rare elsewhere in Midgard. Here are a few examples—the GM is encouraged to invent more.

Player characters can use the training rules to gain proficiency with vril weapons and armor.

Cassadegan Coil Rifle: These mystical devices are typically found in ancient caches in advanced stages of corrosion, and it often takes over a dozen specimens to reconstruct a single operational rifle. The weapon is roughly the size of an arquebus or quarterstaff and has an unusual segmented barrel.

You must plug the coil rifle into a vril battery to fire it; each shot fired uses one charge from the battery and fires a special ferromagnetic projectile at your target at deadly speed. If you roll a natural 1 on your attack roll, the rifle explodes, inflicting 2d6 lightning damage to you and the rifle cannot be fired again until it has been repaired by a Cassadegan expert in vril technology.

Weapon	Damage	Weight	Properties
Cassadegan Coil Rifle	1d12 piercing	10 lb.	Ammunition (range 40/120), loading, two-handed

Ferromagnetic Projectiles: These round balls are crafted with a secret formula of specially charged iron that reacts to the vril-powered propulsive force of the coil rifle's battery pack. You can purchase ten projectiles in Cassadega for 10 gp; prices are at least double elsewhere in the Wasted West.

Vril Battery: These long, cylindrical glass jars contain alternating discs of copper and orichalcum suspended in a briny alchemical solution and are needed to power vril weapons and other artifacts. The jars are sealed with filigreed brass end caps with short terminals and thumbscrews that allow for the attachment of all manner of devices. Newly charged batteries contain 50 charges and attached devices consume this power at different rates. The containers are rare, and despite their nonmagical nature, efforts to reproduce them result in failure. The metal plates and solution can be replaced by Cassadegan experts at the cost of 1,000 gp, recharging the battery to 50 charges.

Vril Lightning Baton: Two leather straps cinch this brass-filigreed, 1-foot-long glass tube to a forearm, and embedded wires in an attached glove control the device via finger movements. Inside the tube, a translucent blue liquid surrounds a copper cylinder containing an iron rod that pokes out the wrist end.

You must plug this powerful ranged weapon into a vril battery to be able to fire it; each shot fired uses one charge from the battery and releases a crackling bolt of lightning. If you hit with a ranged attack, you deal 1d4 lightning damage to a target up to 120 feet away. You can delay discharging the weapon for up to 4 rounds, using your action to build up to a more powerful, single bolt. Each round you delay expends a charge and increases the damage as follows: 1 round, 3d4 damage; 2 rounds, 6d4 damage; 3 rounds, 10d4 damage; 4 rounds, 15d4 damage.

Building up the damage requires concentration. If your concentration is broken, all spent charges are lost, and the bolt deals only 1d4+1 damage to its target. Attempts to charge the device for more than 4 rounds cause it to explode, dealing 15d4 lightning damage to everyone within 10 feet (DC 15 Dexterity saving throw for half damage).

Ghostlight Forest

Long ago, a primitive druidic sect of giants tended this forest. The giants carefully nurtured the lands to host their rapidly growing tribes, but the fall of Ankeshel inundated this area with Ankeshel's bizarre escaped experiments, the will-o'-wisps. Ankeshelians had cultivated the creatures like rare roses in a hundred different shades and styles, and thousands escaped their blown-glass globes after the fall of the great island city. Eventually the surviving will-o'-wisps found their way to this dark, overgrown forest. The druidic giants saw the wisps for what they were, but the giants found themselves overwhelmed in the ensuing violence and were driven out to Balinor, where they built the great cities of Andarre and Cassilon. The new inhabitants gave the forest its name.

Under the dark boughs, the will-o'-wisps have thrived. The motes blink in and out near scenes of injury or tragedy, like morbid fireflies, and feast on the pain and suffering of unfortunates. Other dangers dwell here as well. Great gouges in the ancient trees warn of green dragons and territorial drakes while loathsome swarms of sluagh or vampiric mists prey on campsites and caravans, leeching life from the unwary, and deadly man-eating plants and vines grow along the trails and roads. Caravans taking the short route between Maillon and Barsella are well advised to keep to the coastal road and not to intrude too deeply into the forest, no matter what lights might beckon.

Rumors of the wood's haunting are not unfounded. Alchemists of Maillon exploring the forest for reagents report witnessing inexplicable spectral battles between primitive giants and swarms of glowing motes. Few live to report since these haunts often turn on the observers.

Mother's Grove: Somewhere in a great grove of rowan and white is the Mother's Grove, a tremendous shrine to the Goat of the Woods, whose priests walk here safely led by Grand Speaker Tivishta Trikinta (see page 232) and her acolytes. Strange creatures stand guard over the sacred grove, including flame-scourged scions and mamuras.

Pit of Caernath: This deep rift in the forest floor is home to Hjiorlech, a herald of blood, and his enslaved hill giant and ogre followers. The deformed purple-skinned giant is a powerful blood mage, who preaches the imminent arrival of the "end times." Hjiorlech conducts frequent bloody sacrifices to honor the Dread Walkers, choosing as his victims anyone foolish enough to enter his demesne.

Spokes: A 40-foot tall moss-covered standing stone sits upright in the center of a large clearing. Radiating out from it like the spokes of a wagon wheel are a dozen menhirs of similar size, lying flat on the forest floor. The stones are covered in ancient giant glyphs and radiate powerful necromantic magic. If the correct ritual is performed, the stones can lay to rest the ancestral spirits plaguing a haunted giant.

Haunted Lands of the Giants

The hinterlands south of the Pytonne Mountains host the crumbling culture of the giant slaves that once served the magocracies. Cursed with long lives and restless deaths, these giants are joyless at best and feral at worst. The parched lands hold the tombs of giants who settled here after their migration from the Ghostlight Forest, only to have their kin perish during centuries of enslavement. Transient tribes of hill and stone giants wander the rocky, scrub-shrouded lands, haunted by ghosts no matter how far they travel.

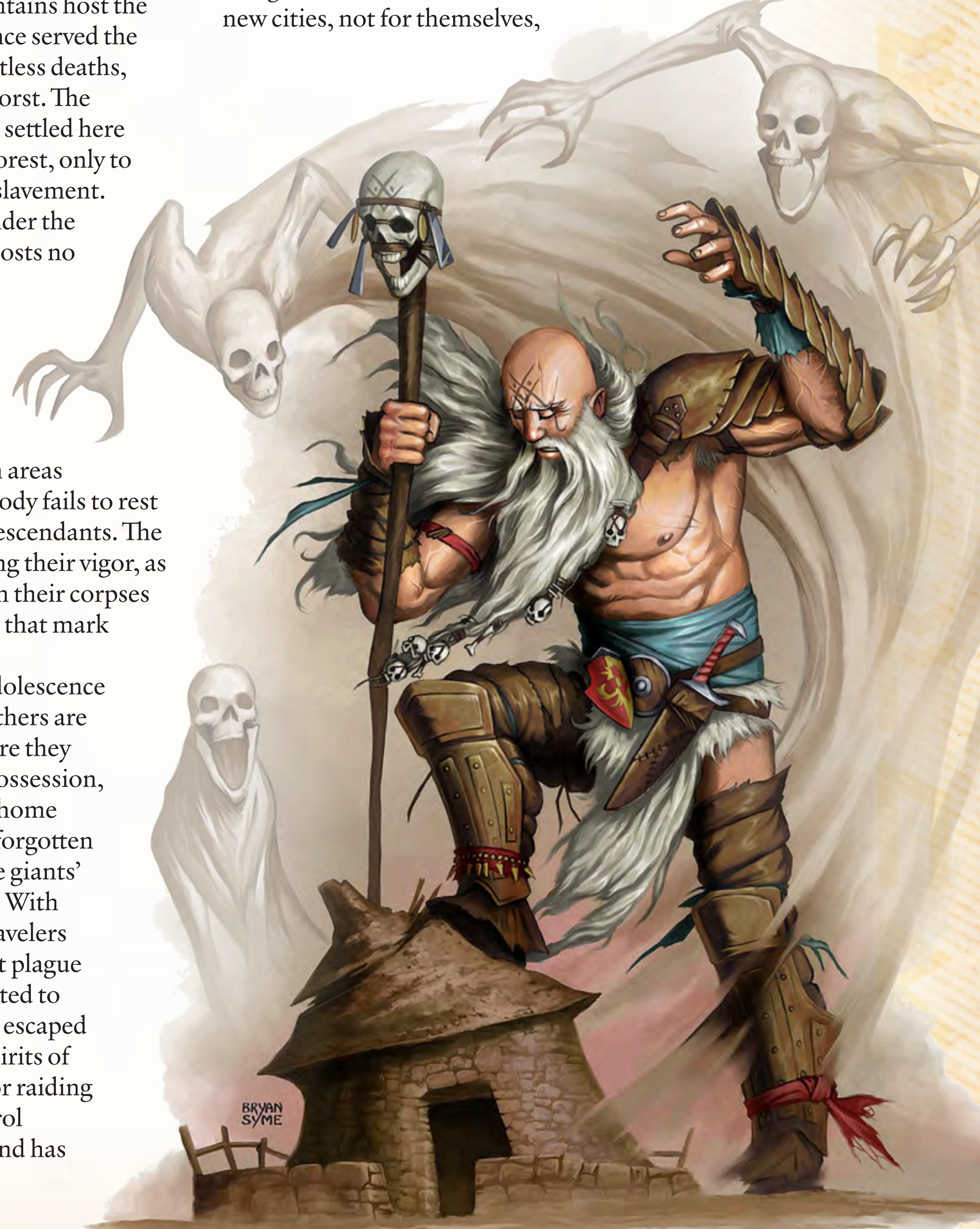
With each passing year, increasing numbers of giant corpses—sometimes one or two, other times entire tribes—are driven up from the ground. Their animated bodies rise up to walk the land, pursue strange goals, and protect otherwise barren areas without discernible cause. When a giant's body fails to rest quietly, its soul returns to haunt its living descendants. The shades loom behind their living kin, draining their vigor, as the spirits cajole their descendants to return their corpses to the stony soil or the balanced rock cairns that mark giant tombs throughout the lands.

Some giants are lucky enough to reach adolescence before a long-dead ancestor arrives while others are haunted by a half-dozen unquiet souls before they take their first steps. All suffer occasional possession, awakening weeks or months later far from home and in the middle of some incomplete and forgotten quest. These oppressive hauntings drain the giants' life, making them morose, sullen, and pale. With the giants' milky, dead-eyed gazes, many travelers mistake them for the legendary undead that plague the realm. Only the frost giants, who migrated to these lands from the northern tundra, have escaped the fates of their cousins and channel the spirits of the dead effectively. They lead small bands or raiding parties, but even with their successful control over the ghosts of their forefathers, their kind has dwindled nearly to extinction.

The ruins of the giant's ancient cities—once glorious towers of living stone—still stand here, now little more than crumbled foundations dotted with hovels and lean-tos. Great Andarre, formerly a seat of stone giant sorcerer chieftains, remains as a dust-choked wreck. Cassilon, once a thriving center of hill giant trade and craftsmanship, fares no better. The giants pick through the decaying buildings for reminders of their heritage and some clue to end the hauntings. Others outfit themselves with dubious totems and warding stones before setting across the landscape in hopes of finding their undead ancestors and putting their bodies to rest.

The Great Ruined Cities

No sooner had the giants built and settled their great cities of Andarre and Cassilon than their founders fell prey to archmages from then-blossoming Caelmarath. The giants of Balinor were forced to build new cities, not for themselves,



HAUNTED LANDS OF THE GIANTS

Symbol: None

Rulers: None

Important Personages: Brotnoth the Uncaring (CN frost giant); Jentilak the Builder (NE male stone giant); Lurbira the Earth Mother (N female stone giant)

Population: 5,300 (3,700 hill giants, 900 stone giants, 400 ogres, 250 frost giants, 50 cyclopes)

Major Ruins: Cassilon, population 200; Andarre, population 70

Great Gods: Gades the Titan (Wotan), Hecate, Emari (Goat of the Woods), Sugaar (the Hunter), Nuberu the Cloud Master (Azuran)

Trade Goods: Stone, antiquities

but for humans. Without their masters to attend them, the glorious stone towers of Andarre fell to ruin, and the encroaching desert swallowed the beautiful carved homes of Cassilon. With the plague of undead on the land, the giants have little energy to rebuild them. Their cities sit like exposed teeth among the bone-white sands of the desert.

Andarre: Massive stone towers mark Andarre, the former seat of stone giant sorcery. Its people lived in harmony with the crags around them, speaking to the stones and coaxing them into fantastic shapes and dwellings. Those few who live here now wander listlessly among the ruins, listening for voices long fled from the living rock. Blind stone giant oracles offer respite to any of their people who seek to lay their undead ancestors down. Intruders are ignored as the most hopeful giants plod and toil among the towers, carefully wearing away bedrock with sure, steady movements to restore the ancient glyphs that once brought the stone to life.

Little lives here, and travelers joke that the stone giants must eat only dirt and rock since no one cultivates or trades in food or water. The locals only trade in stone talismans thought to bring relief from haunting ancestors. Rumors say massive tunnels beneath the broken streets hold ancient tombs, vast underground workshops, and beautiful natural caverns. One collapsed vault far below the ground is said to yet hold a buried shoggoth, trapped there since the Great Mage Wars.

Cassilon: More wild and untamed than its western cousin, Cassilon was once the hub of hill giant craftsmanship and trade. Home to unparalleled woodworkers, the city was once a jewel of framed wooden construction, with nary a support beam or doorway free of the intricate runic designs its people loved. This art, like so much else, was lost with their enslavement and remains unreclaimed while the hill giants are held spiritual hostage by their haunting ancestors.

Much of Cassilon burned in the upheaval surrounding the arrival of the haunts. Little now remains but the burned husks of buildings and a poor and tattered community of transient giants living in squalor. Crime is as bad as the worst human city, and rival gangs of hill giants and ogres rule here, led by those who have laid their ancestors to rest. Some frost giant leaders, such as Brotnoth the Uncaring, employ shamans or rune-stones to dull the control of the ancestral spirits. They trade this relief for the brutal service of their brethren to usurp control of burned-out city streets. They fight viciously over ash, decay, and the sad commerce of their people. Visitors should tread with caution.

Landmarks of the Haunted Lands

Many unusual features mark these haunted lands, including the following sites.

The Black Cypress: Nestled within a backwater marsh near the gulf coast is an ancient, gnarled cypress tree supposedly older than any other. From its moss-draped branches dangle the shrunken heads of many races, left as offerings by the local lizardfolk who worship the tree as a god. From time to time, the tree opens yellow, reptilian eyes to gaze upon those who bring offerings.

Ebon Tombs of the Stone Sorcerers: Ancient stone-sorcerer kings entombed themselves in obsidian-studded sarcophaguses, refusing death. For eons these kings guided their descendants through reflections in the obsidian's black glassy depths. When the giants became enslaved, their sarcophagi were hidden in secret vaults, but when the ghosts began to walk, the old kings' council is again sought, and great rewards await those who can locate these tombs.

The Lonely Canyon: A hidden Pytonne valley hides an ancient horrific event. A steep cliff hundreds of feet high conceals a series of large caves, the mass gravesite of a tribe of giants who starved to death after their crazed chieftain destroyed the rock bridge linking their home with the canyon walls and trapped them there forever. White broken bones litter the canyon floor below where some giants chose to end their own lives rather than succumb to the slow death of starvation.

The Malachite Barrow: This burial mound marks the final resting place of a powerful hill giant king who dared to stand against the mages and saw his entire clan destroyed. No descendants exist for these giants to haunt, so while their undead corpses hunt the surrounding region, their incorporeal spirits take out their anger on all travelers.

Sorrowsown: This small village is home to a handful of hill and stone giants who have successfully laid their ancestors' bones to rest—or cremated them in secret, contrary to giant tradition. These sad-faced giants have rediscovered the stonecraft and woodworking craft of their forebears and sell what they make in Trenorra.

Standing Dead of Balinor: Scattered throughout the Desert of Balinor stand stone statues of gaunt figures. Close inspection reveals them to be withered giants held in place by bony hands breaking from the dunes until they starved to death. Some speculate that this fate will befall all those who fail to heed the call of their ancestors' spirits.

The Stone Father: This enormous granite sculpture carved into the side of a sheer Pytonne peak decays as the day progresses and regains its form each morning. The stone giant's hands reach out, palms upward and fingers curled, in a gesture of forgotten significance. Three gigantic gold rings adorn the fingers of the sculpture, and legends say that when the other five rings are retrieved and replaced the giant will step forward from the rock to liberate his people.

Barony of Trenorra

The only human settlement south of the Pytonnes, Trenorra is a bandit kingdom full of danger and intrigue perched atop long-abandoned goblin mines that riddle the surrounding peaks. The gigantic wooden palisade is visible for miles from the mountain road, and travel is dangerous due to the undead giants roaming the hills.

Humans founded Trenorra long ago, only to find themselves surrounded by ancient burial sites and raised cairns of forgotten tribes. The Trenorrans go to great lengths to accommodate their gigantic neighbors and a few giants get along well enough with humans that they roam the streets. Goblins are permitted within the walls as skilled miners.

Many establishments cater to both humans and giants. Hill giants free from the haunted shackles of their ancestors appear more frequently here than anywhere else in the Balinor territories, unconcerned with the claims of similar giants to the south among the ruins. Adventurers find these giants peaceful if left alone, but they are quick to enrage if pestered about the nature of their people or the troubles that plague them.

The Mage Road to Bemmea winds among mountain passes, and from time to time, the Trenorrans send ore that way in exchange for leather, wool, and magic potions. Their fields are fertile, and they seem protected from the worst of the Wastes' raiders and aberrations by the giants. It is enough to keep the small city going.

Adventurers can capture unusual creatures or aid a stone giant oracle in exchange for some broken artifact recovered from Andarre's underground workshops. Those in league with Bemmean mages, however, should proceed with discretion. The old enmity remains strong, and many giants would just as soon twist a human's head from his shoulders as see their heritage in the hands of those who once enslaved them.

GARDENS OF CARNESSA

Between the Haunted Lands and the lush, exotic jungles above the ruins of old Al-Rassor stands a stretch of impossibly tall, unbroken stone called the Wall, magically grown from the bedrock by the stone whisperers of Andarre. Most assume the giants built the structure to protect the once-lovely magical gardens beyond from the encroachment of the Great Walkers, when in fact the structure stood for centuries before the Great Mage Wars. Built in the heyday of the giants, the Wall was not intended to protect the jungles from the giants, but rather the giants from the jungles.

What little history is known says that the magical Gardens of Carnessa once flourished here, built by wizards from the Empire of Caelmarath to the north. Though doubtless a wonder, scholars debate the gardens' purpose. Perhaps they served as a lush academy for Bemmean mages or the summer home of a distant king. Given the creatures within—animated vines, shambling mounds, ravenalas, and all manner of sentient plants—some suspect the growers nurtured these gardens as a sort of creeping army. The presence of greenhouses of magically infused glass and strange basalt cultivation beds among the jungle ruins suggests the inhabitants intentionally turned their creations toward darker goals, perhaps as an early attempt to enslave the giants to the north.

Whatever their original use, the intelligent plants grew beyond the control of their former masters. An incredible, alien jungle sprouted from the original gardens and took over the entire peninsula—even enveloping the old ruined port of Al-Rassor. Clinging vines threaten to climb up the great barrier, even as swelling roots find every crack and pore and attack the Wall from within. With no real civilization to hold the Gardens in check, some wonder if powerful soldiers of branch and bough, leaf and stalk—nurtured from seed and unswervingly loyal to some mysterious force—will soon march forth to conquer the lands to the north.

In recent months, disturbing reports from explorers brave enough to climb (or fly) over the Wall, or to land beyond it from the sea, have been doing the rounds in the taverns of Barsella and Bourgund. These tales speak of mindless humanoids with thin green vines growing from their empty eye sockets, mouths, and ears, and twisting around their heads, torsos, and arms. These strange creatures, known as tendril puppets seem to be under the control of the vine lords—long-limbed plantlike humanoids covered in dark green bark and wrapped in coiling tendrils.

BARONY OF TRENORRA

Symbol: Four vertical bars, gold and black

Ruler: Baron Hesperos, Lord of the Ghost Lands and Master of Trenorra (LE male human fighter 10)

Important Personages: Xanas (CE female human); Old Splinter (NE male stone giant); Machuca the Collector (LN male human)

Population: 6,500 (5,700 humans, 600 goblins, 140 ogres, 50 hill giants, 10 stone giants)

Capital: Trenorra, population 5,500

Great Gods: Ailuros (Bastet), Charun, Gades the Titan (Wotan), Goat of the Woods, Nuberu the Cloud Master (Azuran)

Trade Goods: Adamant, gold, artifacts

explorer, is compiling an almanac on the wasted west and its strange inhabitants and phenomena. He was the first to discover that the previously unknown Emerald Walker, Veth-Shoon, lurks deep in the jungles of Carnessa and is behind the extraordinary growth of their plant life.

VETH-SHOON

In Yawchaka, the Living Jungle of Kush far to the south, lives the Green Walker, a towering six-legged monstrosity of writhing vines, plants, and moss, which launches its bulbous seed pods in all directions as it lumbers through the forest, spurring on the jungle's prodigious growth. Now, what appears to be the Green Walker's twin has appeared in Carnessa.

This new Dread Walker, known as Veth-Shoon, has not been magically slowed by mages, like the Walkers in the Wastes have been, or by druids like the Green Walker in the Southlands. Instead, the gargantuan plant monster has accelerated the growth of Carnessa's jungles unchecked. Veth-Shoon has created dozens of vine lords as its servitors and they in turn have used their spore pods to transform the humanoid inhabitants of the jungle into tendril puppets. Everywhere Veth-Shoon treads, bizarre, fecund plant life springs up.

No one knows for certain why there are now two of these behemoths in Midgard. One theory at the Academies Arcana is that the mages who built the Gardens of Carnessa traveled to the Southlands, brought back one of the Green Walker's seed pods and released the spores, one of which grew to become Veth-Shoon. Rival scholars posit that since portals have been known to open spontaneously from Midgard's jungles to the Jungles of Kled in the dreamlands of the Realms Beyond, both Walkers may have simply wandered through these dimensional gates to make new homes in this world. Either way, the threat to the Haunted Lands of the Giants beyond the Wall, and thus Trenorra, Barsella, and Bourgund, has made the rulers of those cities very concerned.

BARSELLA

Isolated from the other magocracies by the inhospitable Ghostlight Forest, the Pytonne's rough passes, and the unpredictable giants, Barsella has long sat nestled along the coast of the Western Ocean, the last free city before a vast stretch of water with no known end. Barsella is one of the few accessible centers of civilization this far west and has its own unique culture and heritage. The "city at the edge of the world" has grown to house adventurers and explorers of all stripes who flock here to seek the great unknowns concealed beneath the Western Ocean.

Barsella is a free city, ruled by a representative council of old seagoing families who understand the wealth that comes from the strange ocean. These families are well entrenched and canny enough to remain elusively out from under Bemmea's thumb. The city thrives on importing and exporting adventure, and many use its busy port to organize expeditions into the Haunted Lands, Allain, or onward into the Wastes as well as over the waves. A constant and popular debate rages in taverns and hiring halls over where more lives are lost—east over land or west into the unknown dangers of the Western Ocean.

Barsella serves as a port of call for those heading north to trade with Bemmea and does a brisk, if illicit, trade in vril artifacts heading for the Seven Cities. Nothing of value changes hands here without the ruling families getting a piece. The taxes on equipment, bulk supplies, fodder, cordage, docking, and ship repairs are considered extortion by merchants plying these waters, but they have little other alternative. Gambling halls—yet another source of income—line the streets of Barsella, beckoning the lucky and foolish. The city offers more than diversions and ways to lose money, however. As a hub of trade and adventuring, it houses talented shipwrights, well-staffed brothels, efficient provisioners, and arguably the best-run port in Midgard.

For all the riches such enterprises provide, the fortunes of Barsella wax and wane with the obsessiveness and competitiveness of the ruling families to seek treasure and new lands across the Western Ocean. In the past, fewer than one in ten ships would return from these long, dangerous, and expensive journeys, but the success rate has improved in recent months. The imprisonment of Mnemosyne, goddess of memory, has weakened the magic she used to make the Western Ocean impossible to navigate, and more ships are making it back to Barsella.

When a ship does reappear—even years later—the wealth it brings returns investments a hundredfold with holds full of exotic spices, gold, magic metals, exotic beasts, and strange artifacts. This influx of wealth flares brightly for a brief period, and Barsella's streets roar with festivals and celebration. Talk of the next expedition begins well before these parties end, and such ventures rarely lack for money or volunteers.

Perhaps the most startling feature of these journeys is the utter lack of consistency between them. Over the mar expeditions to the West, they have yet to receive a single consistent report of what lies over the horizon. Hundred of documents exist—including bottled messages, captain logs, and magical communiqués—describing radically different destinations on similar headings. Tales of ghost ships, giant merfolk, strange lands, cannibals, leviathans, burning islands, shadow currents, and worse all exist, but none ever agree, and they differ wildly in ways that perpetually puzzle scholars. The high death rate of the journeys makes the successful ones stand out starkly. Sailors are hailed as heroes, yet the unreliable reports do not give the expeditions' sponsors any confidence for planning settlement, conquest, or even the next voyage. Still, the adventurous spirit lives on, and in every month of fair weather a new ship sets out over the horizon. Thos aboard, more likely than not, never return.

CITY DISTRICTS

Being blunt people, the Barsellans call their ten districts by what is found therein: Arch Town, Founders' Den, Money Town, Port, Saints' Lot, Shanty Town, Ship Town Trade Town, the Wash (undercity), and Whores' Lot. The common sailor spends most of his time at Port or Whore Lot where entertainment of other types is also found.

Cartographers with arcane knowledge realize Barsella' major city streets are laid out to mimic the ancient aboleth glyph of avo-yrleth, a glyph both indicating the presence of strong ley lines and protecting them. Barsella still has a few strong ley lines, though even these have weakened over time.

FOUNDER'S DEN

This walled district houses all the government buildings, many of which are made of imported stone. The domed, star-shaped Founders' Hall is the centerpiece of the district, with all cobblestone roads leading to it. This building holds the meeting rooms for the Founders' Council, the courthouse, judicial offices, and a basement dungeon. A series of patrolled canals run through this district and Money Town beyond. Ballistae, archers, and soldiers protect this area at all times.

BARSELLA, CITY AT THE END OF THE WORLD

SYMBOL: A silver galleon on a calm blue sea

RULERS: The Founding Families, a council of old pirate and merchant family representatives

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: Founders' Lord Speaker Muros Anthor (LN male minotaur); Admiral Ulrich Thorsson, Barsellan Naval Commander (LN male human); High Commander Bertolf Rimeholdt, Garrison Commander (LN male dwarf); Harbormaster Yvaine Talis (LN female gearforged); Simez Rothgazzi, Master of the High Order of Geomancers (LN male human)

POPULATION: 84,900 (80,000 humans, 2,000 minotaurs, 1,400 gnomes, 900 halflings, 600 dwarves)

CAPITAL: Barsella, population 18,000

TOWNS: Maravahr, population 189; Vurflix, population 136; Goatshead, population 113

CASTLE: Algos

GREAT GODS: Charun, Thor, Sarastra, Seggotan, Nuberu the Cloud Master (Azuran)

TRADE GOODS: Imported silks, exotic spices, lumber, ships, gold

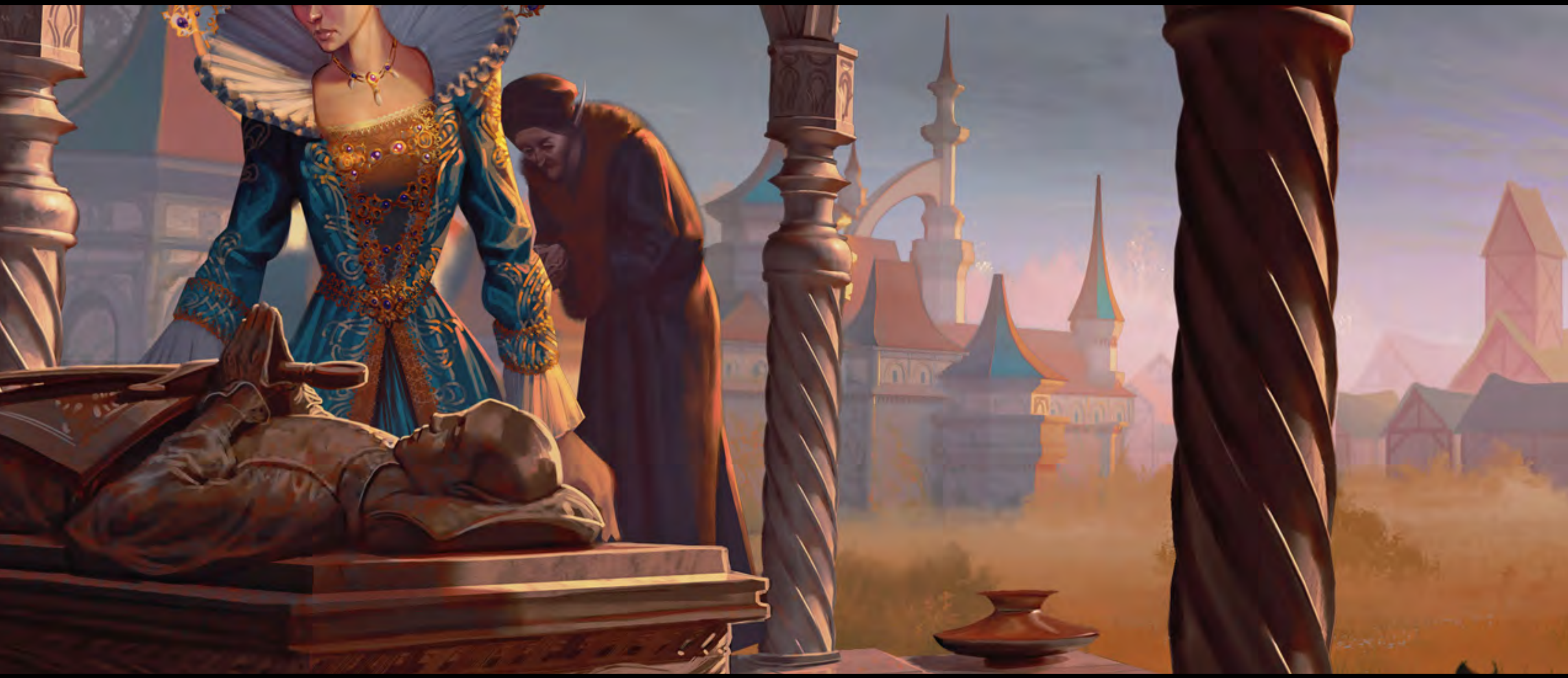
HIGH ORDER OF GEOMANCERS

Located on a ley-nexus point, the last one remaining in the Wasted West, the eight-story High Order of Geomancers' tower rests upon a tor. It rises above the surrounding buildings in Arch Town, commanding a 360-degree view over Barsella, the coast, and out into the Western Ocean. The tower's pale sides are inscribed with esoteric sigils, and geometric paraphernalia covers its topmost observatory level; some of the outward items on that level clang and toll with slight changes in ley energy. Simez Rothgazzi is the master of the High Order, which boasts over 200 other geomancers and dabblers as its members.

ALGOS

This sturdily constructed castle in the Pytonne Mountains is garrisoned by mercenaries funded by the Founding Families of Barsella and serves to protect the City at the End of the World from the haunted giants and other dangers.

GRAND DUCHY OF DORNIG



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The southern kingdoms squabble like children over which of them is the true heir of the ancient elven empires, but for centuries in the north there was no doubt. Until recently.

The Grand Duchy of Dornig, also known as the Domains of the Princes, stood for human generations as the true successor state to the power that once was Arbonesse and Thorn. This was evident in their shadow roads. It was evident in their hoarding of the lost knowledge and magic of the elves and other arcana. Most of all, it was evident in their ruler. Upon the Copper Sphinx Throne of Dornig sat one of the few elves who remembered the Age of Glory, before the Great Retreat and before the despoliations of the Great Mage Wars. The Beloved Imperatrix Regia Moonthorn Kalthania-Reln vann Dornig ruled the land, and all Dornig's lesser sovereigns are her descendants, by blood and by marriage.

Gifted with the presence of a singular respected ruler, Dornig presented the impression of being a land of peace and prosperity, unlike the human kingdoms that squat on the ruins of elven Valera. In reality, it has always been a cauldron of

[redacted]

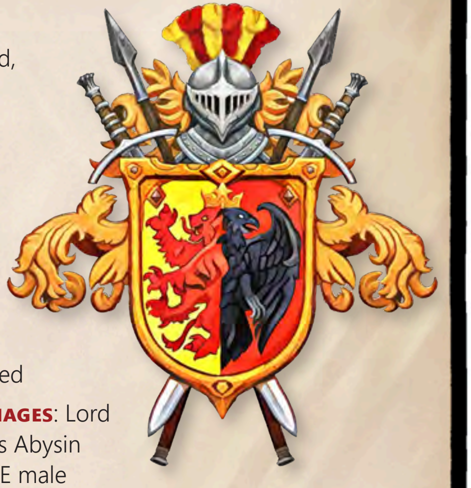
[redacted]

The realm of the elves has been held together by the Imperatrix, but a mysterious illness has thrown the realm into confusion.

without a clear line of succession.

And this creates unrest among the domains.

GRAND DUCHY OF DORNIG



Symbol: An eagle sable, on red and yellow background, counterchanged

Ruler: Beloved Imperatrix Regia Moonthorn Kalthania-Reln vann Dornig (CG female elf bard 10/rogue 10/wizard 10), currently indisposed

Important Personages: Lord Arcane Heronimus Abysin Aldous-Donner (LE male elfmarked); Thadia, daughter and protégé of Thadeus (LN female elfmarked); Saintmistress Rowanmantle (Halia Rowanmantle Derina) (N female elfmarked); Prince Octabian Hirsh-Dammung (LG male elfmarked); General Embrose Hirsh-Dammung (N male elfmarked); Princess Lyndosa Aldous-Donner (LG female elfmarked); Prince Dimitor vann Rottsten (CN male elfmarked); Grand Baron Dymytros Howlik vann Rottsten (CG male elfmarked); Kalvora Moonsong Kalthania-Reln-Orosnig (NG female elf); Queen Urzula of Krakova (LG female human)

Population: 3,800,000 (3,200,000 human, 200,000 elfmarked, 200,000 dwarves, 100,000 halflings, 1,000 elves)

Capital: The Court of the Beloved Imperatrix, the Movable Feast of the Great Procession, currently situated in Reywald

Provincial Capitals: Hirschberg, population 24,000; Reywald, population 18,000; Bad Solitz, population 14,000; River Court, population 3,800

Crown Cities: Courlandia, population 21,000; Salzbach, population 12,000; Donnermark, population 6,300

Vassals: Aucken, Bren-on-the-Voulge, Brinestrassen, Dimmern, Drakehaggen, Fischton, Gemport, House Mervanta, Jerriberg, Kariessen, Keep Aunun, Leofwine Althing, Lingenau, Meglinsberg, Steinhafen, Thornguard, Tomierau, Volestadd

Castles: Arching Castle, Castle Reln, Ransom Siege

Great Gods: Yarila and Porevit, Lada, Perun, Holda, Volund

Trade Goods: Noted by capital or crown city below

CHRONICLE OF DORNIG

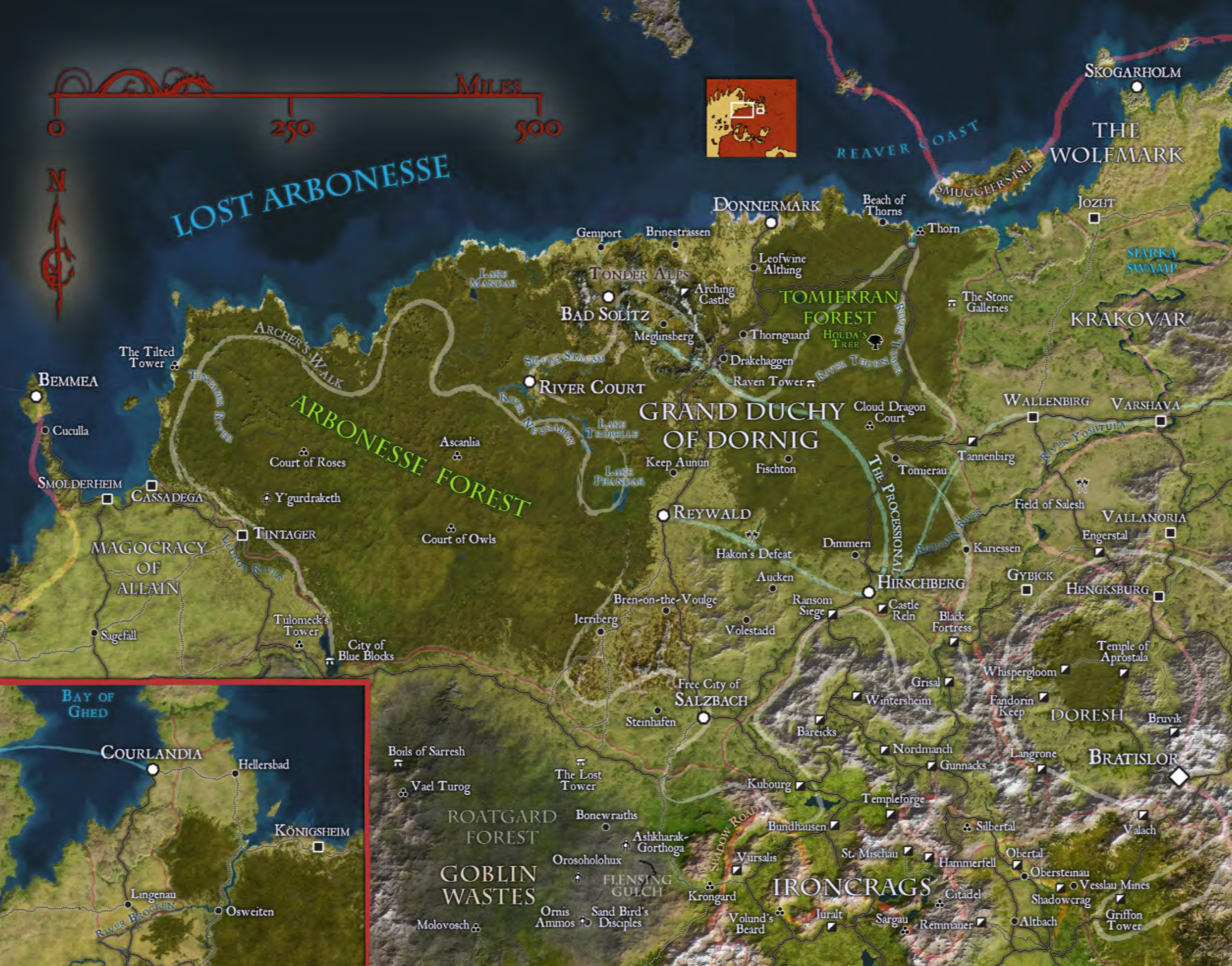
lands along the Great Sea and the Nieder Straits deeply forested when the elves ruled this land. se eldritch beings came from the Summer Lands and ared first in western Midgard, spreading east as far as Ruby Sea. They dominated the old lands that had been ored by the Ankeshelians, and brought fire, light, and ization to the native races. It was they, the old elven s say, who taught the gnomes to weave magic, taught ialflings to serve, taught the dwarves to craft, and ht the humans to dream.

ie elves ruled for a millennium without interruption, for another 500 years during the growing rebellion of estive human Young Kingdoms. The rising power of umans contested the forests and fields that were once rely elven, and the Young Kingdoms' affinity for dark ic gave the Archons of the Elves pause. Some of the ell in with the rebellious humans, becoming shadow . Finally, the Archon Court sounded the Last Horn the elves fell into retreat, pulling back through the low roads to the Summer Lands. Some remained— ew feral windrunner elves of the Dry Steppes, and ll settlements in the Arbonesse Forest—but only one erful elf lasted into the present day.

egia Kalthania stayed behind when the rest of the ion Court chose to retreat to the fey realms. She called Moonthorn by the Company of the Blessed, whom she traveled and which was led by Reln vann nig, the second son of the dukedom of the same name. bards and skalds of the Imperial Court say that she ained in Midgard for both love and for duty. When rystal-armored knights rode from Thorn on that last ning, she wept both for her departing people and for umans and other races they had abandoned.

ie time immediately following the Great Retreat one of tremendous unrest and uprising. The Great e Wars erupted, and while Dornig and the former ı lands were less affected than the lands of the West, e than enough mad wizards sought to plunder the ains of Arbonesse's courts and the halls of Thorn. ı's parents and elder sibling were slain by a group of olists who wished to use the then-Barony of Dornig base. Reln, Moonthorn, and their allies defeated the olists, and Reln took both the crown of Dornig and nthorn as his consort. She in turn took the name of a Moonthorn Kalthania-Reln, Baroness of Dornig.

the turmoil following the Great Retreat and the e Wars, Dornig stood as a bastion of safety and soon iired its neighbors as vassals, eventually subsuming ı entirely. The Baroness of Dornig bore a small host fmarked children over the years, many of whom me great generals and leaders. The baroness became a ıess and then a grand duchess, and at last, with peace blished between the shadows of surviving Arbonesse the Ironcrags, she became the Imperatrix of the lands mpassed by the Grand Duchy.


Miles
0
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N
Lost Arbonesse
Reaver Coast
Skogarholm
The Wolfmark
Smuggler's Isle
Jozht
Slarka Swamp
Krakovar
Donnermark
Beach of Thorns
Thorn
Gemport
Brinestrassen
Leofwine Althing
The Stone Galleries
Lake Mandar
Tonder Alps
Arching Castle
Tomierran Forest
Bad Solitz
Meglinsberg
Thornguard
Holda's Tree
River Tomier
Drakehaggen
River Thorn
Raven Tower
Silver Stream
River Court
Archer's Walk
The Tilted Tower
Bemmea
Cuculla
Tintager River
River Neurabon
Lake Trobelle
Grand Duchy of Dornig
Cloud Dragon Court
Wallenbirg
Varshava
River Yoshtula
Arbonesse Forest
Ascanlia
Court of Roses
Keep Aunun
Fischton
Tomierau
Tannenbirg
The Processional
Lake Phandar
Smolderheim
Cassadega
Y'gurdraketh
Reywald
Field of Salesh
Vallanoria
Tintager
Court of Owls
Hakon's Defeat
Dimmern
Rhogarn River
Kariessen
Engerstal
Magocracy of Allain
Leukos River
Aucken
Hirschberg
Gybick
Hengksburg
Bren-on-the-Voulge
Ransom Siege
Castle Reln
Black Fortress
Jerriberg
Volestadd
Tulomeck's Tower
Sagefall
City of Blue Blocks
Temple of Aprostala
Whispergloom
Grisal
Free City of Salzbach
Wintersheim
Fandorin Keep
Doresh
Bruvik
Bay of Ghed
Steinhafen
Bareicks
Courlandia
Hellersbad
Boils of Sarresh
Nordmanch
Langrone
Bratislor
Gunnacks
The Lost Tower
Vael Turog
Kubourg
Templeforge
Roatgard Forest
Bonewraiths
Shadow Road
Bundhausen
Silbertal
Valach
Königsheim
Ashkharak-Gorthoga
Orosoholohux
Vursalis
St. Mischau
Hammerfell
Obertal
Obersteinau
Flensing Gulch
Goblin Wastes
Ironcrags
Vesslau Mines
Krongard
Citadel
Shadowcrag
Lingenau
Osweiten
River Brocken
Ornis Ammos
Sand Bird's Disciples
Molovosch
Volund's Beard
Juralt
Sargau
Remmauer
Altbach
Griffon Tower

By this time, she had lost her human husband, whose years had been lengthened as far as elven magic could allow. Her eldest child, a daughter, died when Lost Arbonesse sank beneath the waves. Rather than let a younger sibling ascend to the Copper Sphinx Throne (a gift from the Ironcrag dwarves), Regia Kalthania took over the reins of government. Through strength of will and with the tacit support of the surviving Arbonesse exiles, she made good her claim and remained in command of the duchy.

She has outlived her elfmarked children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and every great and petty house throughout the domains can trace their lineage (through blood and marriage and the occasional doctored family tree) to the Imperatrix.

Her rule has been peaceful, for the most part. The establishment of Donnermark had a civilizing effect on the Northern barbarians there, turning the straw-haired barbarians from plundering murderers to rapacious merchants. But occasional abominations reach Dornig's lands from the Roatgard Forest, reavers from across the Nieder Straits remain an annoyance, and 200 years ago the dwarves of Grisal captured the mountainous border to the south, subjugating its human population. Relationships with Allain and the druids of Roatgard are more brittle than they have been, particularly with the appearance of a new Dread Walker, but active skirmishes have been few. When Krakova fell to the ghouls and vampires, the Imperatrix's court welcomed the queen of that land, and many of its people swarmed into the eastern principalities. Through all this, Dornig remained a bastion of stability in a world of trouble.

Yet this steady state now seems imperiled by the very foundation that the nation rests upon—the power that resides within the Imperatrix herself. In 480 AR, the Beloved Imperatrix took ill of an unknown disease that has refused alchemical, herbal, or magical counter. She now lies comatose at a time when forces from without the country threaten it, and individuals within the nation seek to extend their power. Three major houses now vie for control, along with the church of Yarila and Porevit and two potential aspirants to the Copper Sphinx Throne: the Black Knight of the Shadow Fey, and the Imperatrix's alleged granddaughter Kalvora, called the Moonsong.

POLITICS IN DORNIG

Drawn as a political map, Dornig looks like a jigsaw puzzle crafted by a particularly sadistic gnome. It is a collection of lesser kingdoms, duchies, baronies, freeholds, viscounties, earldoms, ecclesiastic grants, dynastic lands, imperial holdings, fiefdoms, free cities, adulterine castles, and principalities. Many of these territories are not contiguous, and though the nation remains an interconnected whole, its smaller components are continually rearranged by court politics and immediate opportunities.

Mapmakers have literally gone mad in the process of trying to determine Dornig's political boundaries. An urban legend in Salzbach claims that its greatest cartographer, Leox the Gentle, spent four years compiling his masterwork, only to present it to the Imperatrix and see her use it as basis for redistricting the various baronies on her most recent Jubilee. He fled south along the Bone Road, shrieking and gibbering.

The largest kingdom in this tapestry of political boundaries is officially Dornig itself. All lands within its borders not assigned to any other vassal are the Imperatrix's private holdings. The smallest independent state is the size of a tavern—an actual tavern, known as the Serpent's Ward and located in the Free City of Salzbach.

The Imperial Court consists of the Imperatrix and her retinue, who rule with absolute control. She in turn receives support from the three main surviving lineages of her children, and a slew of elfmarked lesser houses that serve as vassals to the Houses Major. These three main houses are Hirsh-Dammung, which controls the original Castle Reln across the river from Hirschberg and the strongest military family; Aldous-Donner, which operates out of Reywald on the borders of the Arbonesse forest, the most magically powerful of the families; and the vann Rottstens, who lair in the mountainous uplands surrounding Bad Solitz, near the Nieder Straits.

Each of these houses seek to capture and hold the Imperatrix's ear and dominate the other two. So far, the Beloved Last Elf of the Arbonesse has avoided these snares—but given her current nonresponsive state, the houses are becoming restless.

IMPERIAL COURT

The Court of the Beloved Imperatrix until recently had no set place. Instead, it moved between the three largest cities of the Grand Duchy (Reywald, Hirschberg, and Bad Solitz). This Great Procession was a mammoth undertaking, conveying the Imperatrix, her personal retinue, a court of some 400 courtiers, their personal entourage, and a variety of support personnel. For centuries the Great Procession took place every three years, after the harvest and before the start of the court season.

The Movable Feast of the Great Procession is a tradition dating back 400 years, to the first Jubilee of the Imperatrix. Up to that time, the Imperial Court was based in Castle Reln, near the city of Hirschberg. The Beloved Imperatrix awarded the castle and city to the Hirsh-Dammung line and, after three years, moved to another loyal lord's castle.

In part, this tradition springs from the processions of the Archon Court of the elves of old. That court moved from Thorn to Valera to Liadmura to Sephaya to Arbonesse, an undertaking that created the idea among humans that there were many elven nations.

The court's motion signaled to elves the breadth of the empire's rule. The Movable Feast proved a good idea from both governmental and economic standpoints. A court based in a single location would become entrenched and lose touch with other parts of the kingdom. Similarly, a stationary court would quickly drain the resources of that land. The Movable Feast was akin to crop rotation among farmers—they leave certain fields fallow so the land might recover before the next planting and harvest.

Hosting the Movable Feast comprised both a great honor and a great burden for the three main lineages of the Imperatrix's descendants, each branch vying for the power inherent in its presence and bracing to handle the sudden onslaught of powerful individuals and their demands. The three-year cycle is traditional, but not set in stone. After a treacherous coup attempt by a cadet branch of the vann Rottstens, the Imperatrix forsook the court in Bad Solitz for an additional six years past its turn. This was regarded as a punishment by both the vann Rottstens and the court.

Currently the Movable Feast does not move, and the Great Procession does not proceed. Due to the Imperatrix's incapacitation, the court has come to rest in the city of Reywald. Her Beloved Majesty lies in state in Castle Grauburg on the High Platz overlooking that city, while most of the court mills at Thunderstone Castle down the hill, and the entire city groans beneath the fiscal weight of the additional courtiers.

The Imperial Court is served by a host of courtiers, retainers, chambermaids, butlers, valets, cooks, servants, and other necessary staff. In addition to their official stipends, every single one of them is in the pay of one or more of the three Great Houses. This is expected and tolerated. Some of them also line their pockets with gold from Morgau, the River Court, Allain, Grisal, the other Free Cantons, and Zobeck. This is frowned upon, and an individual who does so risks the traditional traitor's punishment of death by flaying and fire.

Notable Personages

The following individuals (largely elves or elfmarked) are among the oldest and most puissant in the Grand Duchy. Some are centuries-old figures whose plans span generations. None should be taken lightly.

Beloved Imperatrix Regia Moonthorn Kalthania-Reln vann Dornig

The Beloved Imperatrix is an ancient elf, her face elongated and narrow, her ears almost touching behind her head, her eyes huge and black with dilated pupils. Before her debilitating illness she spoke in a whisper that could carry the length of a ballroom, and she moved with a quiet grace. Her hair remains long and white and intricately braided each morning. She wears a simple circlet of copper as her crown, a gift of her consort Reln. Her royal gowns are blue and jewel-encrusted, lined with white silk.

Even before her illness, the Imperatrix seemed to be feeling her years. She sometimes referred to a courtier by his grandfather's name, and occasionally needed reminders about some important unresolved business. She had good days and bad days, yet still had the energy and determination to engage in perilous activities. Those who assumed that they were dealing with a frail, elderly lady in her dotage were surprised by the depth of this withered old elf's knowledge and insight.

This changed four years ago, when following a cotillion in which the young women of Reywald formally entered society, her Beloved Majesty complained to a handmaiden of feeling rather exhausted by the proceedings. She retired to her chambers and did not wake the next morning. Her personal servants summoned chirurgeons, priests, and finally the members of the Arcane College, but no poultice, potion, or spell could revive her from her sleep. She still breathes but lies in a coma-like trance (though the passage of time slows slightly around her). None had encountered this phenomena before, and no text mentions such an affliction.

Her Majesty's body was moved to her chambers in Castle Grauburg, where she is guarded by a dedicated staff of utterly loyal servants. For the moment, the approach is to wait for her to recover on her own rather than risk harm through any experimental spell or magical device. The city below swarms with miracle workers and mages, each of whom claims to know of the matter with the Imperatrix and how to cure her. The court roils with rumor about what crippled the Imperatrix, who is responsible, and ultimately what can restore her to full life.

The nation for its part, seethes with indecision. The Imperatrix having chosen no heir, the nation is currently ruled by representatives of the three Great Houses, plus the Abbess of the Twinned Cathedral. The presence of true elves in the court confuses matters further—the Black Knight and Moonsong, who claims direct descent from the Imperatrix.

Lord Arcane Heronimus Abysin Aldous-Donner

A heavy elfmarked man with sharp features, the Lord Arcane represents the magical resources of the Grand Duchy. He maintains a tome containing the names, training, and relative power of every spellcaster in the realm. He is entrusted with the Treasury of Antiquities, which includes everything "rescued" from the abandoned elven ruins of the Archon Court. In the past, he has cut deals with others to advance his own agenda, including allowing unlicensed adventuring parties into Thorn.

Heronimus is officially the ruling regent while the Imperatrix slumbers, but his continual feuding with the other influential members of the court, including his sister Lyndosa (Princess of Reywald and ruler of the family), greatly reduces his effectiveness. In addition, he argues constantly with the Hirsh-Dammungs about the prospect of war with the Blood Kingdom (he would rather make a pact of mutual nonviolence with the bloodsuckers and let them deal with internal uprising) and has a long-standing grudge against Saintmistress Rowanmantle. In short, he is the most powerful man in the domains, and the most miserable.

Thadia, Daughter and Protégé of Thadeus

Thadeus was the most human-looking among the upper ranks of the elfmarked, and the elven blood was supposedly thin in his veins. For many years he served as Her Majesty's personal chamberlain and clerk. During his reign, he held her schedule in his thin, bony hands. His acerbic tongue and sarcastic nature would often run afoul of the great egos of the court, but he had had the full support of the Imperatrix, so his rivals chose to wait for him to suffer the death that would come to all mortals.

However, upon his death nine years ago, Thadia, the daughter of Thadeus, took the position of chamberlain and proved every bit as formidable as her father. She has a tart tongue and limited patience for the gossip and rumors of court. Nobles made several attempts to suborn, bribe, or drive her off early in her career—she survived all of them. Some of the nobility even pine for the easier days of her father.

As the Imperatrix slumbers (her words), Thadia guards physical access to her mistress and will not suffer any being, human or elf or otherwise, to approach her. She is resistant to attempts to experiment on Her Majesty's recumbent form but has dispatched agents to the far edges of the world to bring back tales of similar afflictions and curatives.

Thadia is a tall, thin elfmarked lady who keeps her shock of white hair gathered in a severe bun. She seems to have the sight of an eagle and hearing of a bat. She has kept the court's day-to-day operations in check and is deeply protective of her ruler.

Saintmistress Rowanmantle (Halia Rowanmantle Derina)

The Abbess of the Twinned Cathedral in Reywald, the greatest building of its type in Dornig, Rowanmantle is a powerfully built, muscular blonde elfmarked lady who looks more suited to driving an oxen team than a major religion. She has been for many years the Imperatrix's constant companion and trusted adviser and was a major avenue for outsiders to gain Her Beloved Majesty's attention in personal matters.

In light of Rowanmantle's long service, the Imperatrix declared the Tomierran Forest an ecclesiastic holding for the Twinned Church. This area includes a great deal of original elven land, including the great city of Thorn, the final capital before the retreat. She supports the Northern barbarian settlements in Donnermark, which was originally Aldous-Donner territory, which puts her on the bad side of that family. Rowanmantle came to the Twinned Cathedral from a militant order dedicated to Yarila, but before that time her life is a mystery. Many courtiers dedicate their efforts to discovering that earlier life story in the hopes of gaining leverage against the priestess.

Prince Octabian Hirsh-Dammung

Octabian Hirsh-Dammung has the blood of warriors in his veins. His ancestor was the great warrior Voltanus Hirsh-Dammung and his son is General Embrose Hirsh-Dammung, commander of Dornig's military forces. Octabian was, in his prime, a holy warrior of Perun, but he came to believe that the best defense is good trade and spent his lifetime since enriching himself, his family, and the city of Hirschberg.

Octabian is an ancient elfmarked, his lean frame thin and emaciated, and he moves slowly among the trophies of the great victories of himself and his ancestors. He dotes on his youngest son Embrose but often treats him as a child, waiting for him to grow up and put away his toy soldiers and deal with the hard realities of gold and balance sheets. Most recently, he has agitated to move the Imperatrix back to Castle Reln, which was her original seat of power and is currently under Hirsh-Dammung control.

The Lords Arcane

The Lords Arcane is the official magical arm of the Imperatrix's government, as well as a semi-secret society within the nation. It maintains standing in the court through its official representative, Lord Arcane Heronimus Abysinn Aldous-Donner, and the group is charged with handling magical instruction, relic research, and dealing with arcane threats to the kingdom. However, while almost any non-divine spellcaster might be member, the names of its fluid membership remain unknown. Most people assume that any spellcaster of note (male or female) is a member, including such individuals as the instructors at the Arcane College in Reywald and the agents of the Treasury of Antiquities.

The Lords Arcane act in an official manner only when they are wearing the ring of their society, which has a blank face surrounded by a coiled serpent (mirroring the nature of the world). Upon donning the ring, a spellcaster becomes an agent of the crown with commensurate powers and responsibilities. These rings bear magical enchantments, and it is said that the one worn by Heronimus Aldous-Donner raises his Charisma to the human maximum while in the company of others wearing similar rings, which enables the Lord Arcane to obtain consensus among a host of independent-minded spellcasters.

General Embrose Hirsh-Dammung

The commander of the Dornig forces is almost human in appearance, his elven heritage only detectable in the pointed ears flanking his shaved head. He is a member of the Imperatrix's Inner Circle along with the Lord Arcane, and Embrose holds a great deal of weight in military matters. His father is Octabian Hirsh-Dammung, leader of the Hirsh-Dammung family line.

The Hirsh-Dammungs are based in Hirschberg, and Embrose's attention is drawn directly to the fallen kingdom of Krakova and the potential threat of the vampire lords to his family's city. He is enthusiastically shoring up the defenses along the border with both Krakova and Grisal. As a result, he is rarely in Reywald, but when there he petitions for more troops to defend the eastern borders, the use of magical relics within the Treasury of Antiquities, and greater access to such old elven sites such as Thorn. General Embrose also recently requested funds to restore shrines and temples to Valeresh, the elven war god.

Princess Lyndosa Aldous-Donner

The matriarch of the Aldous-Donner clan and the ruler of Reywald, Lyndosa is a beautiful elfmarked in the prime of life. She is eternal rivals with her younger brother, who is the Lord Arcane of the kingdom and current Regent of Dornig. Her competition with her brother varies from social slights to seizing and concealing powerful magical devices from the Arcane College.

Due to the Imperatrix's "slumber," Lyndosa's city is awash with conspiracies, con artists, and adventurers. She would be delighted if the Great Procession would kindly proceed forward and leave her to rule Hirschberg in peace. Whether that plan involves relocating the comatose Imperatrix or staging a state funeral matters little to her.

Prince Dimitor vann Rottsten

The youngest prince of Dornig is a mere 16 years old and already a terror. The illegitimate son of the former ruling vann Rottsten and an elven adventurer, he has more elven blood in him than most of the rest of his clan, and they hate him for it. Dark-haired and green-eyed with sharp elven features, he has had to deal with plots against him for most of his life. He has a petulant nature, striking first at any hint of danger and bearing grudges for every slight.

Dimitor's mother, Demalla Ravensblood Olthania, has not been seen for the past year. The official line is that she has gone on a holy pilgrimage to distant Ishadia, but the smart money is that she is dead and her body put somewhere where his enemies (real or imagined) cannot find it.

Grand Baron Dymytros Howlik vann Rottsten

The Grand Baron appears as a typical elf, with narrow features, wide eyes, and long blond hair worn in a truncated braid. He is a younger member of the vann Rottsten clan, so far down the ranking of precedence that another Mage War would be necessary to put him in charge of his family. He is considered one of the nicest members of his clan, and as a result, one of the least effective. However, more often than not, he holds the necessary piece for a deal to go through, should that piece be the favor of a particular courtier, the deed to some hereditary tract, or a magical item. His quiet dark eyes see much and remember everything, and as a result Dymytros is a valuable ally to anyone seeking to navigate the Court of the Copper Sphinx Throne.

Kalvora Moonsong Kalthania-Reln-Orosnig

Two years ago, two years after the Beloved Imperatrix entered the coma, Kalvora arrived at the Court of Dornig with an outrageous claim: she was a full-blooded elf and the granddaughter of the Imperatrix.

All the noble families claim the Imperatrix as their forebear, but all of them, even those of the great families, are elfmarked, mixed blood of elf and human. Yet this elf claimed to be the granddaughter of Moonthorn through a purely elven heritage. Reywald was teeming with various pretenders to the throne, the claims of all of whom could be disposed of by presenting them to the Imperatrix's Regalia. And so Moonsong was brought before the regalia, and it did something that it had done for no other candidate—it reacted to her. It reached out to her. It recognized her.

Kalvora Moonsong's claim may be true. She claimed her father was born before the Imperatrix married, and the nature of time in the Summer Lands means little to the fey people. She had heard of her grandmother and left that world for the Arbonesse, and from there to Reywald. She makes no official claim, but she has been recognized by the regalia nonetheless.

Since that time Kalvora has been in the court, making friends, talking to couriers and adventurers alike. She seems honestly amused by humans and tries to understand how human society works. She often sneaks out of the court to mix with the people of Reywald, usually shadowed by agents of the various other powers who want to know what she's really up to, and to keep any other faction from capturing or killing her. She has already become popular in the eyes of the locals, which frustrates Princess Lyndosa, who has enough trouble with the church under Rowanmantle.

No one knows what Kalvora wants. She seems to be waiting for something, or someone. In the meantime, she is a wild card that could imperil the entire nation, or save it.

Queen Urzula of Krakova

When the undead tides of Morgau and Doresh rolled into Krakova, a flood of refugees washed up on Dornig's shores. They included the widowed queen of the kingdom, her daughter Zosia Waleskam, and her brother-in-law, the Archduke Avgost. The refugees swamped the small city of Kariessen, and with the aid of Embrose Hirsh-Dammung, settled there. Urzula pressed on, hoping to find relief from the Royal Court.

She was disappointed, for the Imperatrix rebuffed her efforts for several years, growing distant when pressed for troops. Then, when the Imperatrix slipped into a comatose state, those who ruled in her absence were divided and even less willing to commit aid. So she remains the queen-in-exile, welcome to court but unable to do anything to help her people or take back her kingdom. As a result, she does what she can—testing the borders, taking care of her people, and trying not to be a pawn in the power games of Dornig. She has allied with Embrose (who now has a vampire kingdom as a neighbor) and Saintmistress Rowanmantle (who hates the undead on principle). Her ultimate goal is to return to her kingdom and avenge her dead husband. That day has yet to come, but she is gathering friends and planning to raise an army.

RELIGION IN THE GRAND DUCHY

The humans and elfmarked of Dornig worship the so-called Gods of the Crossroads—primarily the twin gods Yarila and Porevit (called Freyja and Freyr in the Arbonesse), Mavros-Perun (Mavros to the west, Perun in the south, Valeresh to the elves), Lada, Rava, and Volund. While the crown officially regards all deities of the pantheon as equally valid, not all gods are considered equal in the eyes of the people. In addition, an increasing number of citizens now venerate the old elven gods.

Over the past decade, with the slow return of the elves themselves, the elven mother Holda has extended her influence over the hearts and minds of a growing population in Dornig. Holda is supposedly aligned with Yarila and Porevit but is considered superior to them in the godly hierarchies, a classification that does not sit will the Saintmistress and the clerics of the Twinned Cathedral.

Baccho, also called Baccholon, has also benefitted from the increasing number of elves wandering out of the Arbonesse Forest. A god of poetry, revels, and wine, he is extremely popular among the younger members of the court, and every poetry salon in Salzbach has a small shrine to the god, decorated with smashed wineglasses and broken mugs. Darker rumors swirl around Baccho, connecting him the newest Walker in the Wastes.

Of the dark gods little needs to be said, since they are banned from Dornig. Chernobog is venerated by evil things in the wilderness between towns, Blood Lodges to the Hunter might be found in these lands as well, and Marena and Mammon both have their cults. The greatest danger is from followers of Sarastra, patron goddess of the shadow fey and long a powerful-but-dangerous goddess of the elves. While she is not truly one of the dark gods, the Lords Arcane battle both against spellcasters who seek to learn from the fell fey as well as elves and elfmarked who come under her sway.

FEY ROADS OF DORNIG

Much of the countryside of Dornig is forbidding for the traveler. Two ancient forests dominate the land—the Arbonesse and the Tomierran—but the rest of the countryside consists of smaller but no-less-deep forests of younger vintage, high moors, and deep, tree-covered valleys. Merchant caravans lurch along ancient roads that were first laid by dwarves working for their elven masters. The rivers all flow north to the icy peril of the Nieder Straits, plagued by Northern reavers. How, then, did the Imperatrix keep her Grand Duchy together?

The answer is another legacy of the old Elven Empire—the fey roads. The fey roads are also called shadow roads, the passages tunneled through the Shadow Realm, linking Midgard with the Fair Place on the far side of the world (see Chapter 1).

The fey roads still operate brightly and cleanly between locations in the Arbonesse and the Fair Land. The members of the Court of the River King use the roads to bring their subjects to and from Midgard, and these roads function normally. However, much of the network has been taken over by the shadow fey, who made dark deals with sinister powers and call Shadow their home. They prey on the unwary and make the transit more dangerous than normal. The roads near Zobeck, for example, are notoriously shadowed and do not lead to the Fair Land at all. Outside Dornig, the term shadow road is more common than fey road for this reason.

The result is that many of the shadow roads in Midgard are known to only a few geomancers, Nurian mages, and other arcanists, and even then, most such roads are rarely used, and their waystones and wardings are sporadically maintained. Specific routes, such as the rivers and roads that lead to the Court of the River King, are still patrolled by elves, and as such are safe for these people.

Dornig makes extensive use of the fey roads, though not in the way they were originally intended. For the rest of the world, such roads are few and far between. Their portals are abandoned, broken, and where they do function, are the birthplace of horrors that leak out into the world.

The Processional and City Gates

The Grand Duchy of Dornig uses the old fey roads to hold the empire together. The roads do not reach the Summer Lands, but rather bypass the rest of the world, allowing the empire to communicate and move small groups easily. Such connections are more precisely called shadow roads, since they do not reach the Bright Land.

The Imperatrix made an arrangement with the shadow fey so that they do not bother small groups along the paths (never more than 20 people). The exception is the Great Procession when the Imperatrix, holding the *Phial of Khors* in her hand, led the Moveable Feast from city to city in Dornig along the shadow road called the Processional, one of the oldest of these routes. The Imperatrix kept all shadow creations and evil fey at bay during this procession through sheer force of her will, and this allowed her court safe passage. Those who make the trip could return to their previous locations through shadow at will. With the incapacity of the Imperatrix, those who know these paths are highly valued as guides.

All the cities of the Grand Duchy have functioning gates in the control of the ruling family of that city. These are in turn placed in inaccessible or easily secured areas, with sufficient protection should something, malignant or otherwise, come out. These gates can take any form, ranging from a simple doorway to a grand arch. In the elven lands, the gates might be a hole at the base of a tree or a cascade of rushing water. The traveler might not even know he or she is entering a fey road until it is too late (though if this is the case, turning around is highly recommended). If this is impossible (the gate was a waterfall, for example), the best chance of survival is to let the road take the traveler where it will.

MAJOR CITIES OF THE GRAND DUCHY

The cities of Dornig are not as important as the families who control them. Each of the major lineages makes one of the large cities their main base. In addition, the main family commands the fealty of a large number of subordinate baronies, earldoms, and vassal towns. These towns are not adjacent to the main holdings of the city, but are scattered throughout Dornig. These vassals communicate with the ruling city by means of the fey roads, though they engage in trade with other local cities.

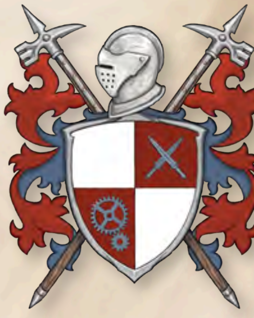
There are three major cities in Dornig: Hirschberg, Reywald, and Bad Solitz, each one of which is the seat of one of the major families. The city's ruler is also considered the matriarch or patriarch of that particular house. All these rulers take the title "prince" or "princess." Minor families control vassal states under the rule of these princes. The cities are provincial capitals and the hubs of the major families' web of vassals and landholdings.

Three "crown" cities owe their allegiance directly to the crown and are considered exceptions to the rule: the Northlander city of Donnermark, the Free City of Salzbach (technically independent but under charter of the Imperatrix), and the territory of Courlandia, which is ruled by a dragon. Their rulers are officially known as "princes" but do not use the title, except in the Imperial Court.

HIRSCHBERG

Located on the western bank of the Rhogarn River, Hirschberg is the largest of the cities of Dornig, and it is a city of both trade and industry. The city sits on routes from Zobeck and Salzbach, and the Rhogarn flows into Yoshtula in Krakovar. Large forges mount the bank downstream from the city, operating day and night to produce all manner of armor, swords, and metalwork. Its smiths have mastered the art of folding metal into multiple thin layers that rival the best dwarven steel.

HOUSE HIRSH-DAMMUNG



COAT OF ARMS: White and red shield, quartered, with crossed swords silver on red in upper right, gears silver on red in lower left, this is also the symbol of Hirschberg; when used as the family crest, it's supported by gray bears rampant and with the family motto, "By the Strength of my Will"

PATRIARCH: Octabian Hirsh-Dammung, Prince of Hirschberg (LG male elfmarked paladin 18 [Perun-Valeresh])

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: General Embrose Hirsh-Dammung (N male elfmarked); Praeter Yohanis Hirch-Dammung, Castellan of Castle Reln (LN male elfmarked)

TOTAL VASSAL POPULATION: 260,000 (250,000 human [50,000 Kravokan refugees], 50,000 elfmarked, 5,000 Arbonesse elves, 3,000 dwarves, 2,000 halfling, 400 gearforged)

HOUSE/FAMILY SEAT: Hirschberg, population 24,000 (19,000 humans, 4,000 elfmarked, 500 halflings, 500 dwarves)

VASSALS: Brinestrassen, Castle Reln, Jerriberg, Kariessen, Ransom Siege, Tomierau, Volestadd

GREAT GODS: Perun (patron), Ceres, Holda, Volund, Yarila and Porevit

TRADE GOODS: Metalwork, gearwork, textiles, fish, venison, stone and slate, armor, weapons

which long ago were plundered of ore. Most of the active mines are now farther west, but the Auldmines are now inhabited by dwarves, halflings, and less savory creatures. Most of the buildings are three and four-story affairs, with an open undercroft beneath for storage, stables, and shops along busy streets, while the residences are on the upper floors. Those structures taller than five stories are government buildings, temples, and large amphitheaters.

HIRSCHBERG ARMY AND NOBLES

The military is prominent in Hirschberg, and uniforms are common in the upper-class parlors. The city traditionally holds a strong military presence due to its proximity to the dwarven-held territory of Grisal, but in recent years, the greater threat has been undead-held Krakovar. The sheer number of troops in the metropolitan area makes both these opponents think twice before invading. Those sons and daughters of Dornig seeking glory join the coastal

[redacted]

Salzbach against forces from the Wasted West.

The upstream side of the Rhogarn is the home of the upper classes. Here visitors find great domed gardens where exotic plants are kept year-round. Here are also some of the larger manors and townhouses of the gentry. All of the major families maintain large estates in or near the cities controlled by the other lineages, keeping a continual eye on each other as well as the minor houses.

Visiting Hirschberg

Visitors to Hirschberg, if they have noble recommendations, are put up at one of the large manors by their hosts. Two weeks is considered a proper amount of time to spend—neither too short to seem abrupt and rude, nor too long to place a burden on the household. Visitors to Hirschberg lacking letters of recommendation find the accommodations less appealing; the inns are crowded, the rooms small, and the amenities expensive.

Elves and the elfmarked are treated with respect in the city. Dwarves are regarded as worthy visitors but foreign to the realm. Gnomes, halflings, and kobolds are treated as servants, with the assumption that they are employed by someone else. Gearforged are treated worst of all—they are considered property, and a gearforged without proper ownership papers can be declared abandoned and confiscated in the name of the crown.

Castle Reln

Hirschberg is built along a bow of the Rhogarn, and across from it a great promontory displays the white walls and sky blue, slate-roofed slate towers of Castle Reln. Three great spans leap the river from the city to the castle, which is rooted in the bare volcanic rock on the far shore. Castle Reln is the oldest and strongest castle in Dornig, and it was the original home of Reln vann Dornig, the Imperatrix's

Exile, vann Dornig made this impregnable bastion his main base, and from it, he and his wife worked through force of arms and strength of negotiation to create the Domains of the Princes.

The castle is kept clean but empty, since it is considered the Imperatrix's property and held in trust by the Hirsh-Dammung clan. The grounds might be used for marching drill by the Imperatrix's army, but these units have barracks around the perimeter of the city. Most recently, Octabian Hirsh-Dammung has recommended that the Imperatrix's body be returned (and possibly interred) in the castle.

Shrine of Blades

Donar, also called Thor or Perun, is a powerful deity venerated throughout the domains, but nowhere as strongly as in Hirschberg. The god is regarded as the mythological ancestor of the Aldous-Donner family and benefits from that family's patronage. For such an important site of worship, the Shrine is a modest temple, noted for its heavy walls, narrow slotted windows, and vaultlike apse. It is made of metal, its shingles forged in the shape of sword blades. During heavy rains or hail, the sound within the church is tumultuous, and when hit by lightning (for the shrine draws Donar's bolts to it, away from the rest of the city), the entire structure glows.

Although other temples in Dornig outshine the Shrine of Blades, it remains a place of pilgrimage. Its leading cleric, Boltmaster Jima Lanternhold (LG male human paladin 9), has been helping coordinate relief efforts for the Krakovian refugees.

Reywald

Reywald is situated in the shade of the edges of Arbonesse, the entry port for most of the trade with the elves of

[redacted]

Adventures in Hirschberg

Hirschberg is the seat of military power in Dornig and controls that part of the nation most directly in the line of conflict, both in a cold standoff with the dwarven rulers of Grisal, and now with the more active hostilities with occupied Krakovar. There are continual sorties from both sides testing out the opposing defenses, and Hirschberg has been shoring up its already prodigious defenses. Potential adventures include:

- **Scouting missions into Krakova.** Armed with information from refugees, the recruited agents would bring back reports of the current status. Often this may include learning the fate of loved ones or recovering valuables left behind during the ghoul assaults.
- **Exploration of Tomierran Ruins.** General Embrose Hirsh-Dammung is convinced that the ancient elves had powerful artifacts that can be used against the undead, and he is frustrated that the Saintmistress, who should welcome the opportunity, stands against him in exploring the elven cities in Tomierran. Anyone who brings back such powerful relics will be rewarded, and those who are caught will be left the church's mercies.
- **Cleaning up Castle Reln.** Praetor Yohanis Hirsh-Dammung, the castellan of Castle Reln, wants it surveyed and cleared in the event the Imperatrix is returned there. Much of the castle is clear, but some passages and wings have been sealed for centuries, and there is no telling what might have crawled into the lower

[redacted]

walls built around a small but very deep lake. White stone towers surround its great Twinned Cathedral. Similar towers can be found along the major roads from Salzbach and the Tomierran forest, and extending along the Arbonflow into the heart of the Arbonesse. These towers, all four stories in height, are permanent watch positions. The towers are staffed independently by units recruited from temples, adventuring groups, and military societies. Most towers have great bells, and the watchtowers maintain huge fire braziers as well. The Rey Towers are also staffed with spellcasters in the service of the Lord Arcane.

As a result of Lord Arcane's constant vigilance, Reywald is an open city. Its city center is a resplendent jewel, and as one moves away from that city core, more large manors and small vassal communities appear. These large manors are the homes of the gentry and nobility in Reywald, and their land raises horses, cattle, and sheep, with bucolic humans tending the flocks and herds.

Twinned Cathedral

The tallest building in Reywald is the Twinned Cathedral in the heart of the city, the greatest temple in the north and the mightiest dedicated to Yarila and Porevit, the gods of field and farm. It is made of nearly translucent gold marble and fitted with amber glass in its great windows, and its glow might be seen from 10 miles off on a sunny day. It has two great spiked towers rising from a huge transept. The Imperatrix held court within this great cathedral when in Reywald. These great towers are carved with angels and archons, who, the local legend states, will come to life if the city is ever endangered.

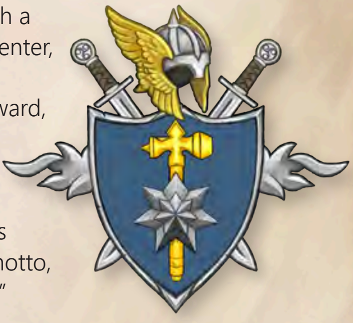
The Twinned Cathedral dominates a broad plaza at the heart of the city, surrounded by various smaller buildings of the clergy, and beyond them smaller temples to others of the Crossroads gods—still good-sized but modest in the resplendent glory of the temple of Yarila and Porevit. The Twinned Cathedral sits upon its own fey gate, and Saintmistress Rowanmantle makes use of it to journey to other parts of the kingdom.

Arcane College and Treasury of Antiquities

Reywald is the home of an extensive magic college that operates under the auspices of Dornig's Treasury of Antiquities. Officially in charge of recovering and examining old magic of the Archon Court, the Arcane College also fields its own units of spellcasters who are attached as adjuncts to Dornig's armed forces. In its role of recovering old magic, the Treasury approves all investigations in the Arbonesse Forest (at one time they controlled the magic of the Tomierran Forest as well, but have lost that authority to Saintmistress Rowanmantle). The Treasury of the Antiquities is empowered to search unlicensed magical practitioners in these areas, and to confiscate any items.

The Arcane College is located in the College Ward southwest of the Cathedral, in a complex of interlocking structures rumored to extend down through basements and subbasements and contains several fey gates. The tower that dominated the ward, the Thornloft, is staffed by members of the college, mostly natural philosophers relaxing on the peak and apprentice scholars doing the work of upkeeping the tower.

HOUSE ALDOUS-DONNER



Coat of Arms: Blue shield with a golden seven-pointed star center, above a golden warhammer (Donar's hammer), head upward, which is also the symbol of the Aldous-Donner house; when used as the family crest, supported by owlbears salient and with the family motto, "With Caution Aforethought"

Matriarch: Lyndosa Aldous-Donner, Princess of Reywald (CG female elfmarked wizard 18)

Important Personages in Reywald: Lord Arcane Heronimus Abysin Aldous-Donner (LE male elfmarked), Saintmistress Rowanmantle (Halia Rowanmantle Derina) (N female elfmarked), Romanja Silberhaar (CE female human), Her Prescience Briga Aldous-Donner (CG female human)

Population: 1,150,000 (1,000,000 human, 120,000 elfmarked, 15,000 halfling, 15,000 gnomes, 2,000 Arbonese elves)

House/Family Seat: Reywald, population 18,000 (4,000 human, 3,000 elfmarked, 500 halflings, 500 gnomes, 100 elves)

Vassals: Aucken, Arching Castle, Bren-on-the-Voulge, Dimmern, Drakehaggen, Fischton, Keep Aunun, Thornguard

Great Gods: Yarila and Porevit (patrons, also called Freyr and Freyja without causing offense), Donar (Thor), Hecate, Sif, Volund

Trade Goods: Leather goods, horses, woolen goods, lumber, art (sculpture), extensive trade with the River Kingdom of the Arbonesse

The High Platz

To the southeast, the land rises in broad hills traditionally belonging to the now-extinct Grauberg family (a cadet branch of the Aldous-Donners). The comatose Imperatrix has been installed in a set of suites in Grauberg Castle overlooking the city, and access to her is extremely limited (and must be approved by her chamberlain, Thadia). Her

Majesty is well cared for and breathes normally. Though she does not eat, she does not waste away. No force, magical or otherwise, can reach her.

Still, the lower halls of the manor are filled with those wishing to pay their respects, to inquire after her health, or to offer their prayers. Medicos, surgeons, and all manner of humbugs who are convinced that they have the sole remedy for the Imperatrix's condition also pervade the manor. Some of the court can be found here, but others have taken up residence in other local manors. Thunderstone Castle at the base of the hill has become the new gathering spot for the nobility, waiting for news, one way or the other, to come down from Grauberg.

Reywald in Detail

The seven towers of Reywald are four stories high and topped with great bells, which have distinctive rings. They toll the hours in sequence, but the Hexenhold remains silent. Should the Hexenhold sound, this would be a sign that the city was in danger.

T1. Sturmspire: This tower stands closest to Castle Aldis and is maintained and staffed by House Aldous-Donner, pulling from worshippers of the ancestral church of Donar. Its bells are the newest, recently imported from Hirschberg.

T2. Twofold Turm: The church of Yarila and Porevit maintains this tower, located in the formerly ecclesiastic neighborhood of the Twinning. Saintmistress Rowanmantle claims an entire top floor of one of the nearby buildings, with a view of the Cathedral.

T3. Heartwood Tower: Originally surrounded by parks, the area around this tower (the Rowenstraude) remains one of the greener neighborhoods, with some of the larger trees surviving. It is maintained by a local group of entrepreneurs, who use the upper floors for receptions several times a month.

T4. Old Belfry: Set in one of the older neighborhoods around the Twinned Cathedrals, this tower's ancient iron bell tolls slowly. It is funded by the church of Veyland (Volund), which holds small ceremonies in a shrine in the main entrance.

T5. Archon Column: Perched in the Arboncross neighborhood, a location noted for cheap housing used by students and bureaucrats, the Archon Column has recently been renovated, its bells replaced with a carillon that plays a variety of tunes. Whether this would be useful in the case of an emergency is yet to be determined.

T6. Thornloft: Maintained by the Arcane College, this tower rises above the College Ward. Official (and unofficial) experiments take place here. Its top floor has been rebuilt several times in recent memory.

T7. Hexenhold: The seventh tower is also maintained by the Aldous-Donner family but recruits its staff from the Arcane College and the Treasury of Antiquities. Its bell of unbreakable crystal was taken from (or was a gift of—stories vary) the River King. It never sounds, save in the gravest emergencies.

Other Sites, Important and Otherwise:

Reywald retains much of its elven heritage, even as humans have made it their own.

1. The Twinned Cathedral: The heart of the worship of Yarila and Porevit.

2. Castle Aldis: The ancestral home of the Aldus-Donner clan. Lyndosa keeps her quarters here and receives visitors in its great hall.

3. Treasury of Antiquities: This complex is reputed to contain numerous extradimensional spaces used to store dangerous and useful magical items.

4. The Oaken Inn: The best place to stay in Reywald for the short-term traveler, famous for the southern cuisine served by its kitchen.

5. The Tomierran: Ophelia Silberhaar maintains her very popular and successful salon in this large block of apartments for well-heeled visitors.

6. Walder Market: Situated near the eastern entrances to the city, this market tends to have goods from Hirschberg and other eastern centers. Of late it features enterprising Krakovian merchants as well.

7. Doppelhouse Tavern & Brewery: A favorite among travelers from the east, renowned for its rich, dark brew.

8. Welthergahger Auction House: Noted for its handling of a range of items from fine art to the deeds of large landholding, the Welthergangers also supposedly run a "midnight auction" for items of more questionable provenance.

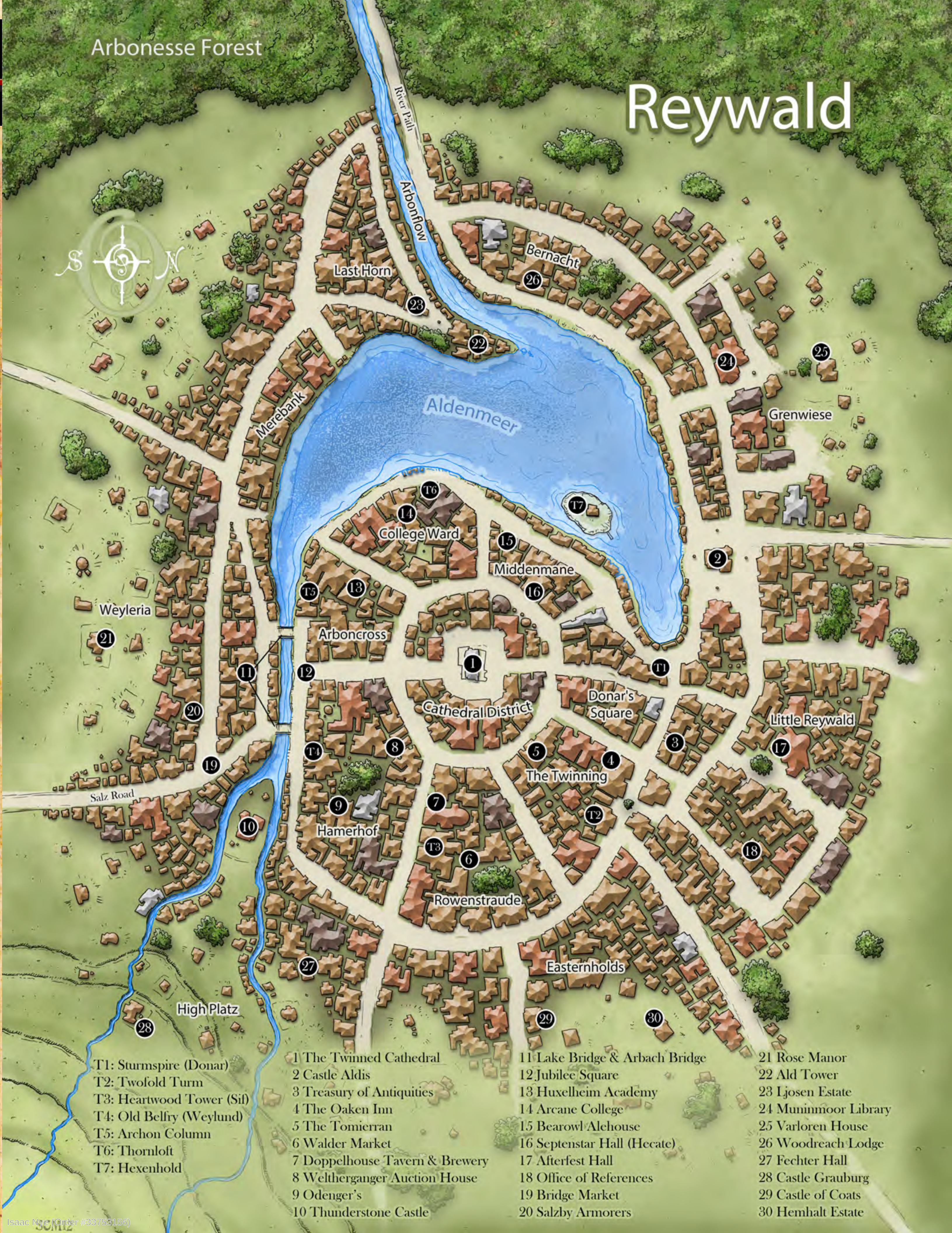
9. Odenger's: A general store held in the same family for three elfmarked generations, Odenger's has expanded its selection of adventuring gear as trade and adventure increases in the Arbonesse.

10. Thunderstone Castle: The de facto center of court life in these troubled time, the Castle teems with upper level nobility that has nowhere else to go. The center of rumor and intrigue in Reywald.

11. Lake Bridge & Arbach Bridge: These two bridges cross the Upper Arbonflow, built so that in case of emergency, they may be sealed quickly to prevent invaders from crossing.

12. Jubilee Square: Actually a T-shaped intersection, the Jubilee Square is dominated by a statue of the Beloved Imperatrix, dedicated on the 200th year of her rule. She looks much the same today.

13. Huxelheim Academy: A college of more general interest than the Arcane College, the academy specializes in the history of Dornig and elven legends. Its library is second only to that of the Arcane College.


Arbonesse Forest
Reywald
River Path
Arbonflow
Last Horn
Bernacht
Aldenmeer
Merebank
Grenwiese
College Ward
Middenmane
Weyleria
Arboncross
Cathedral District
Donar's Square
Little Reywald
The Twinning
Salz Road
Hamerhof
Rowenstraude
Easternholds
High Platz
S
N
T1: Sturmspire (Donar)
T2: Twofold Turn
T3: Heartwood Tower (Sif)
T4: Old Belfry (Weylund)
T5: Archon Column
T6: Thornloft
T7: Hexenhold
1 The Twinned Cathedral
2 Castle Aldis
3 Treasury of Antiquities
4 The Oaken Inn
5 The Tomierran
6 Walder Market
7 Doppelhouse Tavern & Brewery
8 Weltherganger Auction House
9 Odenger's
10 Thunderstone Castle
11 Lake Bridge & Arbach Bridge
12 Jubilee Square
13 Huxelheim Academy
14 Arcane College
15 Bearowl Alehouse
16 Septenstar Hall (Hecate)
17 Afterfest Hall
18 Office of References
19 Bridge Market
20 Salzby Armorers
21 Rose Manor
22 Ald Tower
23 Ljosen Estate
24 Muninmoor Library
25 Varloren House
26 Woodreach Lodge
27 Fechter Hall
28 Castle Grauburg
29 Castle of Coats
30 Hemhalt Estate
SCM12

14. Arcane College: The Arcane College concentrates more on the esoteric and mystical than the pragmatic.

15. Bearowl Alehouse: A favorite among scholars, students, and research assistants. The ale is average, watered-down, and cheap. Its sign is an owl with a bear's head.

16. Septenstar Hall: Veneration of Hecate is rare throughout Dornig, but here on the doorstep of the Arcane College, desperate students seek the favor of the Lady of Tears. Her mazelike hall is often used for studying and clandestine meetings.

17. Afterfest Hall: The largest building in Little Reywald, it is one of the few in the area with sufficient headroom for elfmarked and humans. Numerous small stalls along the perimeter hawk beer, bread, and sausage, while a continual party roils in a central hall filled with tables and benches.

18. Office of References: Originally founded as a repository of family records among the status-conscious nobles, the office is now the chief bureaucratic arm of the court. It has tripled its staff but unfortunately still occupies the same amount of space, so multiple bureaucrats work at the same desk among piles of papers to be notarized and filed.

19. Bridge Market: The large southern market of Reywald. Much of the material that comes from the Free City of Salzbach ends up here.

20. Salzby Armorers: Taking its name from Salzbach, these armorers do a fine trade in armor, weapons, and training in the Valeran sword styles.

21. Rose Manor: A massive manse in the Weyleria district, Rose Manor is held by an individual known as the Winter Rose. The Winter Rose is always masqued, is supposedly noble, and may change from appearance to appearance. Still, the Rose throws great parties during court season.

22. Ald Tower: Situated on the edge of where the Arbonflow leaves Aldenmeer, it was originally a lighthouse, quay, and tariff office for river traffic. Now it is the lair of Hieronymus Aldous-Donner, where he plots and plans against everyone and anyone who has wronged him (a long list).

23. Ljosen Estate: The Ljosen family has fallen upon hard times; their manor in the Last Horn district of Reywald has been rented out to courtiers seeking large apartments.

24. Muninmoor Library: Founded 70 years ago by rebellious members of the Arcane College, the library's goal is to make knowledge available to a broad swath of the population. Information is traded here, and those with a story or a legend can buy access to the restricted stacks.

25. Valorean House: These quarters have traditionally been shared by representatives of the Seven Cities. Now, with Reywald becoming a semi-permanent capital, ambassadors from a variety of nations take their lodgings here.

26. Woodreach Lodge: Established and owned by the Portage Society, a group of adventurers who made good 20 years ago. They struck it rich in Arbonesse, cashed out, pledged loyalty to the Imperatrix, and settled down. Their children, raised in the lodge, are coming of age and itching for the adventures they heard about growing up at the hearth.

ADVENTURES IN REYWALD

Reywald has traditionally been a city of magic and beauty—its proximity to the elves of Arbonesse influencing both. With the Imperatrix trapped in her slumber and resting in Grauberg Castle, it has taken on a political dimension as well. The rivalries between the church of Yarila and Porevit and the Aldous-Donners have become sharper over the years, and those factions not present in the city are jealous of those within. Potential adventures include:

- **Patrolling the Tomierran**: Saintmistress Rowanmantle has title to the Tomierran, a state that no one else likes. She is looking for adventurers who can act as agents to keep the worst of the depravations at bay. Though she has turned down General Hirsch-Dammung's requests to explore himself, should her agents find something useful, she will gladly pass it along.
- **Wandering Sister**: Ophelia Silberhaar runs one of the most impressive salons in the city, which has gained in its reputation with the court cooling its heels here. Her sister Romanja, however, is a wild and dangerous sort. An artifact of power has been "removed" from the Treasury of Antiquities, and Romanja has disappeared. Is she responsible, or is she trying to recover it for herself?
- **The Oracle**: Her Prescience Briga Aldous-Donner, loyal servant to the Saintmistress, has prophetic visions. The most recent dreams indicate the Beloved Imperatrix is not in Grauberg Castle, but lost in the Arbonesse. No one know exactly what this means.

27. Fechter Hall: The closest thing to a thieves' guild in Reywald, Fechter Hall is well known as a place where relics of dubious provenance, misplaced shipments, and family heirlooms can be sold at a modest price. Squatting at the feet of the High Platz, the owning Fechter family has tried to hew to the straight and narrow, but it is hard to shake off bad habits.

28. Grauberg Castle: Current resting place of the Imperatrix.

29. Castle of Coats: Not really a castle but a haberdashery run by gnomes, it has more than its share of scandal but is legendary for its clothing, especially ball gowns beloved by the court. Orders are perpetually filled up for the next season.

30. Hemhalt Estate: A respectable property held by a dubious family, the Hemhalts live in one palatial wing, offering the remaining rooms to paying guests.

Visiting Reywald

Visitors to Reywald who have business with the Treasury are advised to take quarters close to the city center. Those of elven heritage might impose on the local gentry, but most find that the social circle consists of visiting each other's manors for weekends as opposed to larger, more opulent gatherings. Halflings and gnomes are ubiquitous as a servant class, and they have their own community to the north of the city: "Little Reywald," noted for making few allowances for human- or elf-sized visitors in its rooms and furnishings. Halflings and gnomes are under curfew in Reywald. After the last bell they are expected either to be in Little Reywald or to stay in the quarters provided by their employers and masters.

Bad Solitz

Tucked among the forbidding peaks of the Tonder Alps, Bad Solitz lies in a broad, verdant, tiered valley leading up to the massive city-fortress at the far end. Never conquered, the city is in many ways a mirror of the great fortress of Castle Reln outside Hirschberg. A great wall runs along the surrounding hills, and mountain outposts keep an eye on the main approaches to the city.

Those approaching the city are struck by the smell. Not of industry and people, as in Hirschberg, but of sulfur and ash. Volcanic vents and hot mud flats litter the moors. The earliest records of Bad Solitz indicate it was used by the Archon Court as a vacation spot, where they could rest in the hot springs and mud pots. This active volcanism continues, and landslides and elemental incursions shake the land throughout the Tonder Alps. There've been no active eruptions near Bad Solitz for the entire reign of the Imperatrix, a connection that is not lost on the vann Rottsten clan that commands this area.

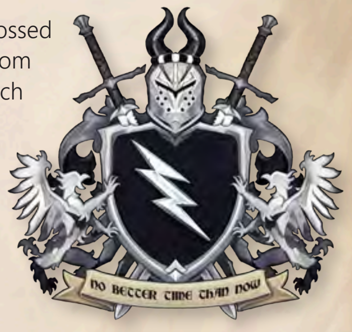
The valley of Bad Solitz is well watered and fertile from the volcanic ash and dust. As a result, the area's winemakers create some of the finest vintages in the north, the grapes raised in tiers overlooking the valley. The

ponds, in such plenty that if the vann Rottstens sealed the main gates at the far end of the valley, the entire city could survive on its produce and the stores kept deep within the mountain.

Vann Rottsten Clan

The vann Rottstens are recovering from almost a decade of decline and misrule. The head of the family, Jodario vann Rottsten, was killed in what is euphemistically called a "magical incident," last seen being dragged into the Lower Planes by a host of devils he had summoned. He had, before he apparently perished, recognized his illegitimate son Dimitor as his heir. Dimitor was born to a full-blooded elven adventurer, Demalla Ravensblood Olthania, who served as regent for the young prince. Though she and Jodario never officially married, the

HOUSE VANN ROTTSTEN


No Better Time Than Now

Coat of Arms: Black shield crossed with a silver lightning bolt, from upper left to lower right, which is also the symbol of the vann Rottsten house; when used as the family crest, it is supported by griffons sejant regardant and with the family motto, "No Better Time Than Now"

Patriarch: Dimitor vann Rottsten (CN male elfmarked fighter 12), Prince of Bad Solitz, age 16; his mother, Demalla Ravensblood Olthania (CG female elf rogue 16), who served as regent, is currently missing and presumed dead

Important Personages: Aymoneta Star vann Rottsten, Herald of the vann Rottsten house and aunt (by marriage) of Dimitor (CG female elfmarked); Hudricus Orovan, Keeper of the *key of Veles* (N male elfmarked)

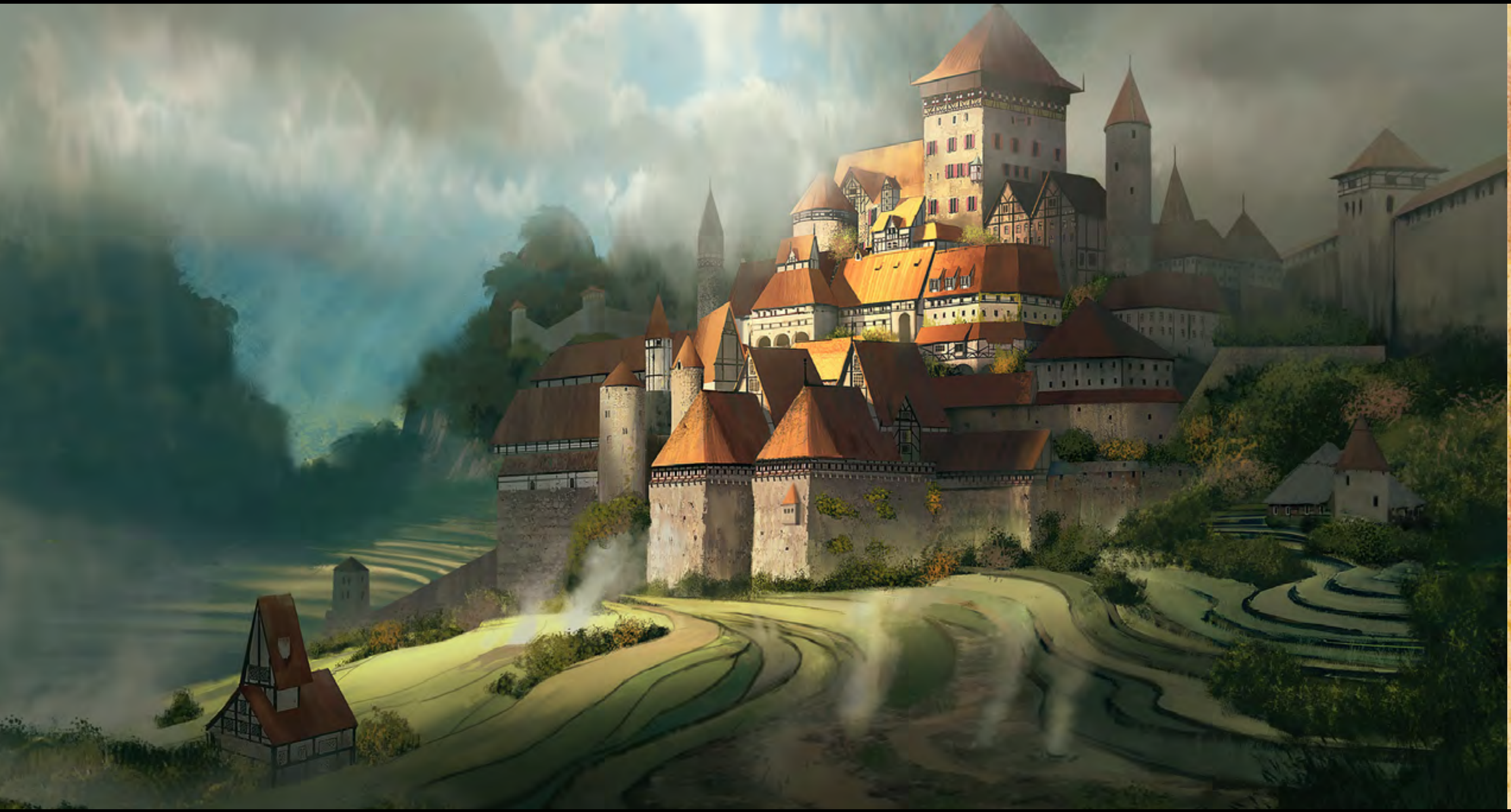
Population: 154,400 (100,000 humans, 50,0000 elfmarked, 4,000 gnomes, 400 elves)

House/Family Seat: Bad Solitz, population 14,000 (8,000 humans, 5,000 elfmarked, 1,000 gnomes)

Vassals: Gemport, House Mervanta, Leofwine Althing, Meglinsberg, Steinhafen

Great Gods: Yarila and Porevit (patron), Holda, Lada, Perun, Veles

Trade Goods: Perfumes, wine, rare minerals, geodes, precious and elemental metals, slate, alchemical supplies, books, lawyers



infusion of "true" elven blood into the family line made it possible for Demalla to protect both herself and her son in an increasingly hostile atmosphere.

Dimitor, a spoiled child who is now a spoiled teenager, has come of age, and his mother "stepped back" from her duties. The official line is that she is "resting," visiting relatives in Ishadia, or "out adventuring," but the general gossip says she has met a bad end thanks to the child she had supported for many years. Unless someone finds a body or contacts her spirit, there is little anyone can do.

Of the three major families, the vann Rottstens are the most volatile. Even under normal circumstances, as a clan they are involved in backroom deals and backbiting gossip. Various cadet branches of the family have initiated plots with Morgau, Grisal, Krakova, and anyone else that might be able to help them. Their plots are usually discovered and overturned, to the relief of the ruling vann Rottsten. Currently, these younger branches of the family look at the young boy-prince and think they can run things better. Dimitor is paranoid but for good reason: his family is out to get him.

Nobles and Artists of Bad Solitz

Despite all the blackening the name has received over the centuries, Bad Solitz is an extremely well run, open city. It has a strong magical and artistic community, made up of individuals who find Reywald too conservative and Hirschberg too mercantile. Bad Solitz boasts the most complete library in Dornig, ranging from dragonwarrior tablets to the latest plays performed in a half-dozen major theaters. Its sages and loremasters are second to none—though the Great Library of Friula claims to surpass the Bad Solitz holdings (a hotly contested assertion).

The nobility maintain apartments in this vertical city, with favored gentry commanding entire wings. These rooms are laced with secret entries and hidden galleries, yet despite this the inhabitants are relaxed and friendly, since they know as much about their neighbors as those neighbors know about them.

Tourmaline Palace

Off to one side of the major city, on a prominent crag overlooking the city, is the Tourmaline Palace. The Imperatrix resides here when the Moveable Feast descends on Bad Solitz, and it commands a view of both the city and the valley. The central palace is left empty when the Imperatrix is not present, and only its outbuildings and lesser halls are used for meetings. Its towers keep pampered prisoners. A small temple to Veles on the grounds is a site of occasional arrivals and departures via the fey road.

Visiting Bad Solitz

Visitors to Bad Solitz find it an imposing but friendly place. Affordable apartments and accommodations are common, if smaller than at the other major cities, and nobility with land elsewhere rent out their quarters through intermediaries. Elves and elfmarked are highly regarded, but other races do not suffer any prejudice. There is no evening curfew, though the Drake Guard (vann Rottsten personal guard in red metal armor) prowls everywhere. The taverns, parlors, and galleries are all extremely lively, though most of the upper class decamps during court season, heading for Reywald and the looming shadow of the Imperatrix.

Donnermark

Donnermark is Dornig's largest port city on the Nieder Straits, and as a result sees both trade with the kingdoms of the North and reavers swooping down to pillage its territory. Its people have strong Northland affiliation and appearance.

The Donner branch of the Aldous-Donner family comes from this area, and the family claims descent from the Northern god Donar. The family seat moved to Reywald 300 years ago, and Donnermark was reduced to a vassal holding.

DONNERMARK

City Symbol: A golden warhammer (the hammer of Donar) between two golden pillars

Ruler: Yorick Hakonsson (CN male human fighter 9/rogue 5)

Important Personages: Torrad the Shouter (CG male dwarf); Harbormaster Mursi Steingrim (LN male human)

Total Population: 49,700 (32,900 human, 17,000 dwarf, 400 elfmarked, 400 gnomes)

Capital: Donnermark, population 6,300 (5,000 humans, 1,000 dwarves, 300 elfmarked)

Great Gods: Donar (patron deity among the ruling class), Freyr and Freyja, Loki, Volund, Wotan

Trade Goods: Fish, ambergris, lumber, charcoal, mussels, northern spar crystals

Adventures in Bad Solitz

Bad Solitz is an excellent jumping off point for adventure. Its surrounding area is forbidding but potentially rewarding to those seeking out gems and the creatures that hoard them. This was elven territory back in the day, and unspoiled outposts are still sometimes found among the hills, waiting for the bravest souls to reveal them. Court life has its own rewards and perils. Prince Dimitor's hold on the line of succession is anything but secure, and he dismisses aides and advisers with frightening regularity and often violent outcomes.

Those who seek to navigate the labyrinthian passages of the court are directed to the Grand Duke Dymytros Howlik vann Rottsten, who is considered the most approachable, least volatile, and most level-headed of the clan. The Grand Duke Dymytros wisely makes his home in Reywald. Potential adventures include:

- **Patrolling the Tomierran**: Aymonetta Star vann Rottsten is herald to the house and the only person who can keep Dimitor on an even keel. She is sister-in-law to Demalla Ravensblood Olthania through marriage, not blood—she was married to the previous prince's younger brother (who in turn died in a suspicious loom accident). Aymonetta does not believe that Damalla wandered off, and she wants someone to either find her or recover her remains for possible resurrection. Of course, Dimitor must not know of this.
- **Gemstrike!**: A dead body, a bag full of cut gems, and a suspiciously accurate map. Is it the start of a gem rush in Bad Solitz, or some other ploy being played out at the adventurers' expense?
- **Wine War**: The rich soil of the Tonder Alps allows for excellent wine and, as for many other things, creates division in its wealth. Two branches of the vann Rottsten clan support different wineries, the "reds" and the "whites," who are not above subterfuge and sabotage to make sure their vintages reach the tables of the Imperatrix's Court.

Hakon's Invasion

Some 100 years ago, the landscape of Dornig changed with the arrival of the adventurer Hakon of the Broad Embrace. Hakon was a plunderer whose longship was caught in a great storm. The ship floundered, and a treasured pair of great golden pillars was washed overboard. Hakon swore to the storm that if the Thunderer granted him his life and helped him recover the pillars, he would make those pillars the gateway to a great temple. Hakon survived and the pillars were recovered on the beach near Donnermark. Hakon built his temple, and he collected a great horde of followers. When the Aldous-Donners complained, Hakon recruited every Northlander within a week's sail to defend the city—and by "defend" he meant "launch an assault on Dornig."

Hakon's great heathen horde plunged deep into Dornig territory. Reywald, the home of the Aldous-Donners, repulsed several raids with their elven-influenced magic and watchtowers. Quick-moving Northlander scouts and light infantry reached Salzbach and the Ironcrags before being turned back. Several Northlander units struck into the Arbonesse and the Tomierran forests and were never heard from again. Internal dissension, some of it encouraged by the vann Rottsten clan, weakened the incursion, and at last forces under the command of General Voltanus Hirsh-Dammung drove the bulk of the barbarians back to their boats and captured Hakon east of Reywald.

Hakon of the Broad Embrace was brought before the Imperatrix, and most expected to see the barbarian leader's hide peeled off before he was committed to the flames. Instead, the Imperatrix pardoned Hakon of his sins and invoked the wergild. He and his descendants would pay the crown for damages done. In return, they would be granted control of Donnermark and with it responsibility for trade in the Nieder Straits.

Adventures in Donnermark

Adventures in Donnermark revolve around raiding to the south or expeditions farther north.

- **The Thunderbrand**: Hakon's sword was a magical blade called the Thunderbrand, believed lost when he was defeated. Now word of this famous blade has turned up in the Bleak Expanse, and a scion of the Hakon name wishes to recover it. Some relatives see the sword as a gift of fealty to the Imperatrix, others as a sign that Donnermark should declare itself independent of Dornig and forge its own future.
- **The Legacy**: A famous local crew, the Sons of Hakon, is looking for brave warriors to go raiding. They are no blood of Yorick, who they consider to be a weak, southernized leader. That said, members of the Donnermark court would want someone to accompany them to protect the interests of the Imperatrix.
- **The Relic**: Survivors of a coastal village stumble into the Temple of the Twin Thunderbolts with a story. Their community was destroyed by reavers in ships with jet-black sails. These reavers plundered the community and stole their holy relic of Donar. Such news strikes a familiar chord to those whose ancestors came to this strange land during a war concerned with recovering religious artifacts.

Present Day Donnermark

Hakon's grandson now rules Donnermark, which swears fealty to the Imperatrix. The port is both Dornig's gateway to trade with the Northlands and the base of the Dornitian Coastal Fleet, which deals with regular reaver raids from Hakon's relatives. Yorick Hakonsson and his court are considered too Northern for most polite Dornig society, and too soft for most of the clan chiefs of the North. Hakon's Temple of Twin Thunderbolts still stands, and it is one of the great centers of worship for the Thunderer.

Hakonsson's greatest challenge at the moment is not he Northlanders, but the other major families of Dornig. He is considering a political marriage of one of his two young daughters to a great house to cement a bond between the two. Neither daughter, who prefer a life of adventure to that of court, finds the idea appealing.

The Free City of Salzbach

Situated in southeast Dornig near the Ironcrag Cantons where the Bone Road emerges from the blasted lands of the Great Wastes, Salzbach was once the home of a fourth major branch of the Imperatrix's family tree. The Salzbachs of the Red Tower were wiped out to the last individual in a single large incursion of abominations out of the Great Waste some 160 years ago. The area around the city of Salzbach was devastated, and despite the incursion being driven back, monstrosities still inhabit the deeper caves and darker woods of the region. The city survived a massive siege by the creatures of darkness only through the actions of its townsfolk, who held out until relief forces arrived bringing Reywald mages and Hirschberg swords.

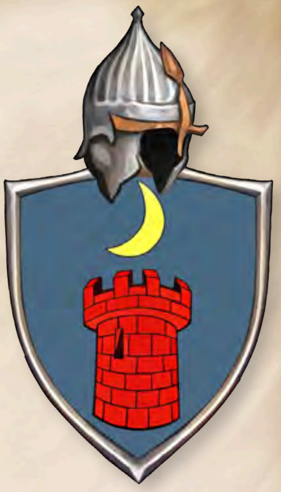
The fall of the house of Salzbach immediately created friction between the other houses as they sought to claim the Salzbach holdings. Rather than endure civil dissension, the crown claimed all the Salzbach lands, which they in turn distributed in bits and pieces as the years passed. Salzbach itself was awarded to the people who stopped the abominations in their tracks.

As a result, Salzbach is considered a Free City in Dornig, largely independent of the various houses and owing fealty only to the crown. Its various guilds elect a lord guildmaster who reports to the Imperial Court. No member of a noble household can be made guildmaster, and the lord guildmaster is held personally responsible for what happens in Salzbach. The position of lord guildmaster is usually taken by an individual seeking to improve the city, or a scoundrel seeking to grab as much as he or she can before being caught.

There have been seven lord guildmasters in the past 10 years. Three died mysteriously in office, two were found guilty of corruption and executed, one married into nobility and thereby had to step down, and one was last seen heading for Zobeck with several bags of embezzled jewels. The current office-holder, Michoda Swanne, was once the leader of the Company of Lorekeepers, little more than a thieves' guild that traffics in old artifacts. She is a twisted old spider of a woman who puts on airs of civility, but who keeps information about everyone and anyone who trades in Salzbach.

Salzbach is an open city where the hand of the Imperatrix rests lightly. Dirty deals are made here and dark secrets are kept. Because of the Company of Lorekeepers, Salzbach is under continual observation by agents of the Lords Arcane, who wish to know what goes where (and perhaps take it for themselves). Sudden deaths and mysterious disappearances are common, and anyone of note keeps a house outside the heavy city walls and a handful of capable and well-paid mercenaries to act as bodyguards. Visitors to the city are advised to keep a careful eye on their belongings, their investments, and their relatives when in town.

SALZBACH



City Symbol: A yellow crescent moon rising over a red tower

Ruler: Lord Guildmaster Michoda Swanne (NE female human rogue 12)

Important Personages: Borin Hirsh-Dammung (NE male human); Anvil Priest Hydrig Vallesulm (NG male dwarf); Brewer's Guildmistress Ypolita Sarsen (CN female human)

Total Population: 48,200 (36,000 human, 10,000 elfmarked, 5,000 dwarf, 200 halfling)

Capital: Salzbach, population 12,000 (10,000 humans, 1,500 elfmarked, 500 dwarf)

Great Gods: Ninkash (patron), Baccho, Lada, Loki, Volund

Trade Goods: Salt, antiquities from the Great Waste and Arbonesse, precious metals, grain, beer

Adventures in Salzbach

Salzbach is a city steeped in merchant intrigue and lost items. Any missing artifact or relic has passed (at least once) though its shops and streets. In addition, with the Imperial Court in disarray, its streets are swelling with adventurers, mercenaries, and representatives of free companies to the south, all seeking what everyone anticipates as (at least) a dynastic battle and (most likely) a civil war with the Imperatrix's passing.

- **Blackmail**: Borin the Weaver survived his term as lord guildmaster and married into the powerful Hirsh-Dammung family. His corruption was well known, and someone has come forward with information (treason!) that could well cost him his head. Borin would gladly pay if he knew his blackmailer would keep quiet, and he is looking for someone to discover the extortionist and obtain information that might be useful against them.
- **Staging Ground**: Additional free mercenary companies are drifting into town, but until something dire happens, there is no immediate work. Some are heading east to work for the Hirsch-Dammungs on the Krakova border, but a lot of them are mixing it up in the streets and taverns of Salzbach. Guildmaster Swanne is willing to deputize individuals who will keep the lawless mercenaries from breaking up the city.
- **The Lost Guildmaster**: Rydney Blinth, a horrible little man, was lord guildmaster for only long enough to stuff a huge quantity of gems into his pockets and head for Zobeck. He never got there. Now, however, gems are circulating in the underground artifact trade with the Salzbach moon-and-tower carved on them, and they are believed to be from that hoard. Has someone found a cache abandoned by the former lord guildmaster, or is Blinth finally resurfacing? Vengeful minds want to know.

COURLANDIA

City Symbol: A red dragon rampant regardant

Ruler: Zennalastra, the Red Queen (LN female ancient flame dragon)

Important Personages: Cansu Fulden, First Court Astrologer to Her Majesty (NE female dragonborn); Saltuk the Silent, Keeper of the Treasury (LN male dragonborn); Emissary of Dornig and Master Merchant Hengelin vann Rottsten (LN male elfmarked)

Total Population: 77,000 (50,000 humans (includes 20,000 Krakovan refugees), 25,000 dragonborn, 1,000 elfmarked, 1,000 kobolds)

Capital: Courlandia, population 21,000 (16,000 humans, 5,000 dragonkin)

Vassal: Lingenau

Great Gods: Baal (patron), Loki, Svarog (Volund), Veles, Wotan

Trade Goods: Ships, salt fish, cattle, oak timbers, smoked oysters, pearls

THE BARONY OF COURLANDIA

At the time of the Great Exile, Courlandia was a colony settled by Dornig on the far side of Krakova, across the Bay of Ghed. It survived the early upheavals following the departure of the elves and sought the protection of Reln vann Dornig. Vann Dornig sent protection in the form of a dragon named Zennalastra.

Reln vann Dornig and the future Imperatrix met Zennalastra when the pair were adventurers. The exact nature of that relationship is unknown, but stories out of the Dragon Empire indicate that Zennalastra was no longer welcome among the Mharoti dragon lords. Zennalastra relocated to Courlandia and set herself up as the Red Queen. Those who opposed this sudden leadership announcement were either eaten or left the port city.

Zennalastra rules Courlandia as a benevolent tyrant. Her maxims are law, and she maintains a small but exceptionally well-trained personal bodyguard made up of retired adventurers. These individuals are highly motivated and well paid, and their sole task is to keep Zennalastra from harm. This is easy within the confines of the palace but more difficult when the red dragon is hunting bison n the peninsula north of the city or stalking whales in the ieder Straits. The sudden collapse of Krakova to undead rces adds another wrinkle to their security. So far the ouls and vampires have been very accommodating to e distant barony, since they know that while Zennalastra efers her meals still twitching, she is not above eating ied ghoul.

Courlandia is recognized as part of Dornig, though the ed Queen has never visited the Imperial Court, instead nding dragonkin emissaries as her representation. Such nissaries keep to themselves and do not participate in the gular politics of the court. They listen a great deal and port everything back to their scaled baroness.

THER CITIES

e numerous smaller towns and cities of the Grand uchy are usually the seat of some minor lordling who has vorn fealty to one of the great houses. The strength of ornig is in numbers of these discreet communities, for a ousand villages are surely the equal of any one city.

The minor houses are innumerable within Dornig, nce every keep and cow pasture owes its allegiance to

ADVENTURES IN COURLANDIA

Courlandia is now surrounded by monsters, squeezed between the undead-ruled land of Krakovar to the west and the devil-dominated gnomes of Niemheim to the east. Being ruled by a dragon is not the worst of fates.

- **The Daughter**: Zennalastra had a life before she encountered Reln and Moonthorn. That life included a daughter, Zayildis, left behind among the Mharoti. Now that daughter is in danger, and she needs someone to bring her back safely to her mother.
- **Patrols**: Opponents on both sides of the barony are testing its defenses, looking for weak spots. The dragon's agents are abroad in Hirschberg and Salzbach looking for individuals capable of dealing with such intrusions.
- **Diplomacy**: Devils and vampires are meeting in Überlauten. Neither side trusts the other much. Pity if something fatal happened at these meetings.
- **Escape Routes**: Refugees from Krakova have flooded Courlandia. Getting people into the barony is one thing—the undead are everywhere and consider anyone who leaves to be stealing food from their fangs. Getting from Courlandia to the rest of Dornig means either a long sea voyage along the Nieder Straits, or a perilous few days (or more) in Shadow along the ancient fey roads to a gate in Hirschberg.

someone, somewhere. Each of the major families, as well as the crown, has a plethora of lands to award. Most of these are granted only for the life of the recipient (and with the normal title of baron), but faithful service and good politics can commute this prize into a fiefdom passed down with the family name. Such lines are normally elfmarked, either before ennobling or soon afterward, as political alliances within the houses are cemented with weddings and progeny.

House Aunun

Seat: Keep Aunun

Ruling Noble: Lord Roth Cereck Aunun, Knight Bachelor, Druid of the Silver Branch (LN male elfmarked druid 5/fighter 5)

Swears Fealty to: Aldous-Donner

Aunun is a rich upland territory of villages and farmsteads on the edge of the Arbonesse. It is a land of halflings and humans whose highland cattle and horses are prized for their hardiness and sure footedness.

Lord Roth Cereck is a distant cousin of the Donner family, and he is famous for his veteran archers and cavalry. Sir Cereck is a tough but fair man who remains neutral in court politics, but he is a staunch defender of his lands and answers to the kingdom when called. Anyone seeking strong ponies or cattle or a quick raid into the forest need seek no farther than his domain.

House Frazton

House Seat: Gemport

Ruling Noble: Baronetta Julia Thunderbow Frazton VI (LN female elfmarked warrior 12)

Swears Fealty to: Vann Rottsten

Gemport is one of the jewels in the vann Rottsten coronet, its merchant ships ranging through the Nieder Straits from Allain in the west to Vidim in the East, providing a needed source of income for the family's coffers. It has one of the most eclectic populations within the domains, its population consisting of humans, elfmarked, elves, dwarves, halflings, gnomes, and the largest rookery of huginn within the Imperatrix's land. Gemport lives for trade, and the family of Frazton is responsible for mediating that trade.

Baronetta Julia Frazton has competently managed in this unenviable position for the past 20 years, balancing the various factions of merchant leagues and ship-building families with the demands of Dimitor vann Rottsten. As the vann Rottsten prince gained his majority, his demands have grown to the point that the baronetta must now choose between weakening her domain or breaking fully with Dimitor's. Gemport's proximity to Bad Solitz indicates caution, but allies from other houses are offering help should such a rebellion prove necessary.

House Grang

House Seat: Thornguard

Ruling Noble: Lesser Duke Methilious Grang (LN male elfmarked wizard 12)

Swears Fealty to: Aldous-Donner

A heavily fortified community situated in the shadows of the Tomierran forest, Thornguard is the official jumping off spot for approved expeditions to the old elven ruins of Thorn (unapproved expeditions are launched from Tomierau).

Methilious Grang has seen his power ebb over the past decade, as the influence of the Church of Yarila and Porevit drew the forest under ecclesiastic control. Members of the church are now overtaking Grang's carefully constructed maze of bureaucracy. His petty bureaucrats are just as diligent as they had been earlier, but now are overseen by managers loyal to Saintmistress Rowanmantle. Cut off from his traditional duties, Methilious has thrown in with the Lord Arcane, and he keeps the College of Antiquities well informed to events in the shade of the Tomierran.

House Kavanto

House Seat: Kariessen

Ruling Noble: Alzano Kavanto (LN male human fighter 12)

Swears Fealty to: Hirsh-Dammung

Alzano Kavanto represents one of those success stories that Dornig likes to extol. A former adventurer with a storied career in the south and great achievements for the Hirsh-Dammung family, he replaced the previous ruler of Kariessen eight years ago, an elfmarked who died without heirs. He flourished in his new position, raising the town up in status and wealth, and his grown daughter was to marry a minor duke from a cadet branch.

Then Morgau and Doresh invaded Krakova, and a flood of refugees arrived across the borders. Now Kavanto has to deal with a huge refugee camp surrounding the city, an increased Dornitian military presence, and continual probing raids from the undead. The various churches have been incredibly supportive, but most of Alanzo's old comrades are retired or deceased. Should Kariessen fall, he will lose his security and position and become a refugee himself.

House Leofwine

House Seat: Leofwine Althing

Ruling Noble: Viscountess Æthelflæd vann Leofwine (LG elfmarked fighter 9)

Swears Fealty to: Vann Rottsten

Though not among the most influential families of Dornig, the vann Leofwine house features prominently when negotiations with Northlanders are required, especially those with Donnermark. The northernmost reaches of the Leofwine's forested estate is located along the Tomierran forest, just a day's ride from the Donnermark lands.

This friendship with the Northlands runs deep, so much so that the beautiful widowed viscountess Æthelflæd is being courted by Brynjolf Hakonsson, the youngest cousin of Yorick Hakonsson, ruler of Donnermark. The blonde-haired Æthelflæd wouldn't be the first vann Leofwine to marry a Northlander. Some of the vann Rottstens are irked by the expansion of Hakonsson's bloodline into theirs, but others in the family see it as an opportunity to further their influence in Donnermark.

HOUSE LJOSEN

HOUSE SEAT: Fischton

RULING NOBLE: Calidane Fishton-Ljosen (LG elfmarked wizard 15)

SWEARS FEALTY TO: Aldous-Donner

Located within the Tomierran Forest and reachable primarily by shadow gate, the ancestral seat of the Ljosen household is typical of small, remote baronies in the wilder parts of Dornig. It occupies a small valley with a motte and bailey castle at its center. It is a picturesque community of farmers and herders who have never left the region. And it is bordered on all sides by a dark forest that holds primeval dangers.

The Ljosens are said (by the Ljosens) to date back to the first years of the Imperatrix's reign, their loyal rewarded with this remote barony. The family has fallen upon hard times, unable to trade effectively, such that the manor house in Reywald (run by Calidane's cousin, Emilana) has been fully rented out to courtiers.

HOUSE MERVANTA

HOUSE SEAT: The Serpent's Ward in Salzbach

RULING NOBLE: Merv, sixth of the name (N female elfmarked rogue 10)

SWEARS FEALTY TO: Vann Rottsten

The smallest fiefdom in Dornig occupies one tavern in Salzbach. Seventy-five years ago, Joraria vann Rottsten was being pursued by a mob. He sought sanctuary in the Serpent's Ward, a Salzbach tavern, and promised the proprietor Merv nobility and a grand of land if Merv would save him. Merv rescued Joraria, but instead of a full barony he asked for the city block where the tavern was located. The award was unusual, but the agreement stood as being fully legal and binding.

The Merv who runs the tavern now is the sixth individual with that name and the first woman. The award for the fief was made specifically to Merv but did not dictate the return of the province upon his death. With the passing of one Merv, his heir (always of the same name) takes over both the bar and the fiefdom.

The Serpent's Ward retains the official capacity of a fiefdom, even though it is surrounded by a free city. It is regarded as a safe place for exiles and runaways, though the protection offered by Merv can be rescinded at any time. The citizens of Salzbach are tolerant of their neighbor, since they never know when they might need its protection.

HOUSE RANSOM-VIDII

HOUSE SEAT: Ransom Siege

RULING NOBLE: Anton Ransom-Vidii, Graf vann Vidii (CG male elfmarked ranger 11)

SWEARS FEALTY TO: Hirsh-Dammung

This borderland house has produced generations of famous rangers, hunters, and trackers. Ruggedly independent, they have never failed to provide alpine rangers and elfmarked archers to the Imperatrix. The Imperatrix had an extended dalliance with the current graf's grandsire; several of their great-grandchildren are courtiers and honor guards at the Imperial Court.

Ransom Siege is an ebon fortress carved out the side of Keskau Mountain near the border with Grisal. A small grassy plateau at the top of the mountain holds an open-air shrine to Yarila and Porevit, and the twin gods have been said to appear there in the form of shepherds or goatherds.

HOUSE REICKENBACHT

HOUSE SEAT: Imperial Conservatory at Tomierau

RULING NOBLE: Free Earl Ulmer Wilfaden Reickenbacht (LN male elfmarked wizard 6/bard 4)

SWEARS FEALTY TO: Hirsh-Dammung

The Reickenbachts are well-respected lorekeepers among the various minor houses, though no one but them knows their full name and title as the House Reickenbacht, Pfende-Derina, and Polsenfaust. Elven blood runs strong in their veins and their memory runs deep. The Reickenbachts maintain the most extensive records of lineage for the elfmarked houses, and they have blood ties to all of them.

Tomierau's proximity to the Tomierran Forest makes it an excellent jumping-off point for expeditions. With their exclusion from Thornguard, the Lord Arcane has a vested interest in the town regardless of its fealty to Hirsh-Dammung. Members of the church reside here as well, but they are not as effective as elsewhere. The Saintmistress is considering appointing a high cleric to the local church to reduce tomb-robbing.

Aside from their stewardship of noble lines, the Reickenbachts are accomplished musicians, artists, and bards. The soft-spoken Earl Wilfaden occupies his time arranging musical masterpieces for the court's enjoyment while also managing the unenviable task of keeping his troublesome kin from scandal.

HOUSE REXTHATHUS

HOUSE SEAT: Brinestrassen

RULING NOBLE: Lord Mayor Cassant "The Regal" Rexthalthus (LG male elfmarked paladin of Perun 14)

SWEARS FEALTY TO: Hirsh-Dammung

Overshadowed by Gemport to the west and Donnermark to the east, Brinestrassen is forgotten by all except shipbuilders, shipping fleets, and individuals seeking to slip into or out of the domains with a minimum of fuss and bother. The lord of the land comes from a family vested deeply in shipping, and he seeks to protect his interests and his town from outside hostilities.

If anything, Lord Mayor Cassant has been too successful in his mission to preserve the static nature of Brinestrassen. He has a huge (by elfmarked standards) family, with numerous descendants, siblings, and cousins, mainly mariners who make Brinestrassen their home. However, he has never named an heir and now grows old and feeble. With his passing, the various factions—each claiming to have the best interests of the port at heart—may tear the domain apart.

House Rhodewaldt

House Seat: The Arching Castle

Ruling Noble: Margrave Jannis Corelian Rhodewaldt (LN male elfmarked paladin of Thor 11)

Swears Fealty to: Aldous-Donner

The elven heritage of the Rhodewaldts is dubious at best, making them prime targets for petty intrigues. The grim Margrave Jannis is the only recognized elfmarked family member, and that is a tenuous claim on his mother's side. More obvious is his heritage with the Northlanders, since he is a giant of a man with matching temper and ambition. He seeks to rectify the weakness in his elfmarked claim by further discovery of his family tree, and by producing heirs who could marry into one of the larger families.

He has not succeeded in the first goal but has in the second, with two young sons who take after their father in size but with definite elven features. However, strife fills his home; his beautiful wife Arianna (LE female elfmarked rogue 7) spies for the vann Rottstens, who would like to add his territory to their holdings. Should something happen to the Margrave, Arianna would become regent until the boys come of age. Jannis is very aware of the possibility and seeks proof of Arianna's plots.

A SEASON IN COURT

Court is in session wherever the Imperatrix resides, and even in these most unusual times, nobles arrive in a steady stream in Reywald, seeking rulings, advice, appointments, blessings, and favors. However, the true social season of Dornig occurs in the winter months, when the snow is thick on the ground and routine travel is all but impossible. During these times, the fey roads bind the families together. Many of them descend on Reywald, Hirschberg, and Bad Solitz for what is normally called "the social season," or sometimes the Omessali, the Winter Dances, among the older generation.

The social season begins in Redleaf, after the local Harvest Dances for the various feasts, and no later than the Night of the Open Roads (the first winter moon). It lasts until Springmelt and the Mustering, by which time the various clans are expected to be back in their domains for the coming planting season. Various events might keep some members of the family away (a sudden incursion from across the Nieder Straits or an invasion from the Great Wastes), but the courtly vassals are expected to present themselves to their superiors and report on their achievements of the previous year. The rest of the time, it is a season of dances, feasts, and celebrations.

The Dornitian Court Season includes Ghost Night and the Lantern Festival, with traditional celebrations. One of the grandest celebrations is the Imperatrix's Birthday, a "Crown Festival" that consumes three days of balls as each major family seeks to outdo the others in pomp and splendor. The fifth day of Snowfall is the official calendar day of the Imperatrix's Birthday, though celebrations can be a full two weeks at the time of an Adamantine (100 year) Jubilee. Most recently, such celebrations have been muted by the Imperatrix's condition.

During the season of court, the evenings include presentations of new plays, poems, and chamber music pieces, along with grand balls and feasts. The choice of dancing partner is particularly important in the social pecking order, as is where one sits at the feasting table. In general, closer to the head of the table implies preferred status, and those seated "below the salt" (about halfway down the table) are considered to be present to fill out the chairs and not make the hall seem too empty.

Since the season is an opportunity for various rival houses and smaller clans to mingle, friction inevitably follows. There are competitions between rivals, as well as the occasional assassination (kept to the lesser houses, since Saintmistress Rowanmantle stocks up on restorative magic for this time of the year). Duels are officially outlawed (but they occur anyway), as well as romances, flings, and assignations. Young debutantes are traditionally presented to the Imperatrix during the Lantern Festival, and a swirl of activity envelops any family that has a child of marriageable age. Newly made barons and baronesses arrive at court and find themselves under the scrutiny of the young scions of more established families. Many weddings have come out of the season, as have many feuds.

The season officially lasts until Springmelt and the Mustering. All new promotions and postings are announced, and it concludes with a military review and a parade. On the years of the Moveable Feast, the entire court would pack up at this time and the Imperatrix would lead them to one of the other major cities, which had been bracing for the arrival of the hustle and bustle of the Imperial Court.

GAINING A DORNITIAN BARONY

Despite the fact, or perhaps because of the fact, that their land has been ruled by a singular leader for 400 years, the major families of Dornig are always looking for new blood. A hero who has a reputation for valor and is willing to swear fealty has a good shot of getting his or her own piece of land, a deed to a castle or country house, and a baronial title. This is a situation tailor-made for adventurers.

How to Acquire a Barony

The following conditions must be met for an individual to be awarded a fief in Dornig.

- **Human, elf, or elfmarked.** The families prefer to expand their ranks with elves and elfmarked, but humans of good character are welcome. Other races probably need not apply. (There are no halfling or dwarf landed barons, though they might be awarded court appointments in the military when appropriate.) Tieflings, huginn, gnomes, minotaurs, gearforged, and other minor races are not considered suitable for the peerage.
- **Of sufficient experience.** Level 10 or higher.
- **Renowned in Dornig.** Feats of daring and power in the south might get an adventurer invited to the better parties but won't pay out with a title. Adventurers seeking to retire to a sweet barony and a life of ease discover that their previous work elsewhere matters little. Notoriety is not enough—they must accomplish great deeds locally. If you are using the optional Status ability score, this is easier to measure: the character must have a current Status of 20 or more to be awarded land.
- **Favor of a particular house or the Imperatrix.** The crown and each of the major houses has a smattering of baronies available as a reward for loyal service. Helping a house (or the Imperatrix, via proxies) will fulfill that requirement, whether it involves recovery of an artifact, rescuing a clan scion, or preventing a particularly nasty scandal to gain merit in the eyes of a house. By the same token, such actions might irritate other factions.
- **Comeliness.** A Charisma of 15 or higher is recommended. Other mitigating factors might come into play, but no new baron or baroness has a Charisma below 9. There are enough sad and average faces within the family trees already, and the clans are looking for compelling notables.

One thing missing from this list is money. Mere gold is not enough to gain a fief in Dornig, and profligate displays of wealth are regarded as gauche. It is good to have gold, but to show off that one has it is not done. One cannot simply stake out a claim and build a new castle from scratch—rather, one is awarded the honor of holding land and swearing fealty to the Imperatrix and her other vassals.

Also, baronies are awarded to individuals, not to groups. An adventuring party that is offered the opportunity to control a barony will have that offer made to one of its members, and that member is held responsible for the land as well as for the actions of his or her fellow adventurers when acting on behalf of that land.

The major houses and the Copper Sphinx Throne have baronies to give away for a number of reasons. The primary one is death of the previous vassal. Baronial awards are for the life of the holder and are not passed down to future generations without the Imperatrix's consent. Usually such consent involves marrying into one of the families. New barons are regularly called upon to serve their liege-lords by dealing with particularly thorny issues—after all, this is why the Dornig lords agreed to make them barons and baronesses in the first place.

Details of a Barony

A typical barony is relatively small—the borders of most can be seen from the baronial seat. It likely collects a regular income from its populace in the form of fish, tolls from river traffic, lumber, cattle, or mines of precious metal. The liege-lord (a mid-level member of one of the major families) takes the bulk of that, leaving enough for day-to-day entertainments in a comfortable style.

A castle, keep, or manor house on the property represents the baronial seat, controlled by a castellan appointed by the ruling family, who both keeps the books and an eye on the new baron. Wise barons stay on the good side of the castellan. Near the keep or manor house, the primary town of the barony operates through the offices of its mayor, council, and church leaders. They are relatively self-regulating as well, since a commoner in such pocket baronies can see a half-dozen barons over time. The locals expect protection from their liege in times of crisis.

The barony usually includes a gate that allows entry to the fey roads, and through it to the other towns, major and minor, of the realm. Such a gate is often located in the deepest part of the keep, under lock and with continual guards, but could be an archway in the garden, the door to a family crypt, a swinging gate in the middle of hedge maze, part of a folly set off from the main keep, or even a road or stream that appears to lead nowhere. Other paths and destinations are discovered by accompanying others. The castellan or one of his agents can walk the fey roads to Reywald, Hirschberg, and Bad Solitz, and any summons from the liege lords arrives by a messenger who can lead the summoned on the path back.

Losing a Barony

Barons can be sacked for failing to perform their duties. These duties include returning a modest profit on their lands, presenting themselves to the court, providing soldiers in times of conflict, and making their talents available for use by their liege-lord. Failure to do so results in a visit by official representatives of the crown and the barony withdrawn. Those who still occupy the castle will be removed by magic, siege, or assassination. A baron or baroness found guilty of treason will be put to death in the traditional Dornig fashion (the skin flensed from the body, and the still-living criminal then burned at the stake).

Baronies can also be abandoned by the fief-holder, and depending on the circumstances, such resignations might be accepted with good grace or declared treason. Experiences vary depending on the situation.

COMPLICATIONS OF A BARONY

All baronies are different, but they are different in similar ways. When setting up a barony for players, any of the following traits might be considered.

CONTESTED: The ownership of the barony is in doubt: disputed by a rival claimant who asserts descent through a hereditary lord (now long dead), or another branch of the family, or another family entirely that had lost control through marriage, politics, or arrest. For example, the barony was the dowry of a minor vann Rottsten clan's daughter, whose husband was a Hirsch-Dammung. Both husband and wife died soon after marriage of a coughing plague, and both major families claim the land. The crown might appoint someone to this contested land, making the new baron either popular with both factions, or the enemy of at least one and perhaps both.

CORRUPT: This is a suitable challenge for a barony on a trade route that is not threatened by outside forces. The bureaucracy is deeply and endemically corrupt, making bribery the only way to get things done. The previous baron was found guilty of treason through his double-dealings and dealt with in the usual final manner. The new baron is expected to clean up the area, but if the locals are inconvenienced, they could set up the new baron for the same fate as the old. The castellan could be as corrupt as the rest, or simply ineffective and open to responding to the dedicated support of an honest ruler.

DUNGEON: A new baron moving into a monster-plagued region might soon find out where the monsters are coming from. This could be a cavern complex, an entry into Shadow, or a set of elven ruins previously not on any map. This could provide an additional revenue stream for the baron, though he or she might have to conceal it from the liege-lords or they will confiscate it for themselves.

REBELLIOUS: The people are restive: unhappy with taxes, tithes, tariffs and the heavy hand of a distant crown. The new baron is merely the most recent toady in a long line of ineffective fops foisted upon the hard-working townsfolk and free folk by conniving nobles. All it takes is one spark to set the entire region alight with a farmers' revolt, necessitating the help of the army to put it down (which never looks good on one's resume).

RELIGIOUS: The barony is the site of a temple, shrine, or other holy place. On the plus side, the barony hosts pilgrims and the wealth that arrives with such travelers. It also houses a priestly class that has strong ideas of how the barony should operate, and that might consider itself exempt from local law.

REMOTE: The barony is literally in the middle of nowhere, with a single thin road leading out of it, or perhaps none at all. The citizenry is isolated and provincial, and while the barony does well enough to sustain its own needs, it exports little except what can be carried on mule back or by a trained traveler on the fey roads. On one hand, it is a good place to retire; on the other, it has little sway in court.

THREATENED: The area is rife with challenges, which is one reason the barony is available in the first place (owing to the death of the previous vassal). There is no end of threats in Dornig. Baronies along the Nieder Straits must deal with reavers, while those in the southwest contend with abominations that spill out of the Great Wastes. Those along the border of Grisal and the Free Cantons deal with dwarven raiders, and those near the Tomierran and Arbonesse forests are challenged by the legacies of the Archon Court and tomb raiders. The border with Krakovar, once peaceful and open, now swarms with undead. Even in the heart of Dornig, locals shut their windows securely at night against the deep caverns and shadowed woods, and trust that the new baron will be able to deal with whatever wanders into their land.

TRADE ROUTE: Baronies along a lucrative route are
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Running a Barony in Dornig

Gaining a barony should not be regarded as a sudden burden of additional paperwork but rather as an opportunity for further adventures. Those who seek to fully manage a barony at a more precise level can find rules to do so. Instead, gaining a barony creates a springboard for new adventures. These include not only traditional adventures involving the slaying of monsters, but also political intrigue as the new baron expands his or her influence or faces conflicts with other nobles. Such an award should create new vistas for high-level adventurers as they gain responsibility for others and obligations to superiors.

Swearing Fealty in the Grand Duchy

The oaths of vassalage among the elves are magical and require an incantation performed during court season. Currently the fealty is made to the Imperatrix through her representative, the Lord Arcane. The act of swearing such fealty is magical, with effects similar to a *geas* spell. This tradition explains the success of the Elven Empire, and the sworn oaths of fealty still follow the same form today.

FORESTS OF DORNIG

In their heyday, the elves ruled much of Midgard and established great cities in Thorn, Arbonesse, and far-off Valera and Sephaya. Then the elves sounded the Last Horn and the Great Exile began. The rulers, for reasons unrevealed even to their own people, dictated that the elves retreat back to Elfheim along the fey roads. Many remained—some among the lower classes and some who chose exile over retreat. These are the elves that Midgard has come to know. Of the mightiest of elves, only the Imperatrix remained. If she knew the reason for the retreat, she did not speak of it.

Only half of the land claimed by Dornig is inhabited by its natives. Two huge swaths of primeval forest dominate its map, but they are rarely visited by its inhabitants. These great forests are officially held in trust by the Copper Sphinx Throne in the names of the elven people, both those on this side of the world and those in Elfheim. Arbonesse is larger, occupying a huge swath of the western part of the duchy. The Tomierran Forest is smaller but considered more dangerous, since it holds the lost city of Thorn, one of the most magical cities of the elves. The Tomierran has been declared an ecclesiastic holding under the control of Saintmistress Rowanmantle.

Another great change in the past decade has been the slow return of the elves. New elven communities have sprung up within the two forests, primarily within the Arbonesse. The communities, currently small villages, appear almost overnight, and their inhabitants treat their domains as if they had always been there. And indeed, given the porous nature of the borders between the Summer Lands and the mortal world in Arbonesse, they may well be right. These new arrivals seem stranger than the elves Midgard is used to, and they have greater contact with other fey creatures.

Most elves found wandering across Midgard are known as the Arbonesse exiles, and they encompass an uncounted population that ranges from the sea-dead stumps of Lost Arbonesse to the borders of the Wastes. Most members of this group have never traveled along the fey roads. The elders among their people travel to Elfheim, but most of those born in the world remain here. It is unknown if this is by preference or by some dictum from high within the Archon Court.

The elder Arbonesse elves move along their fey roads between their lands in this world and those in the Bright Land, and pay little attention to which side of the veil they might be on. The same rules that apply to others for the fey roads and the shadow roads apply to them—they travel only those roads that they know. The nature of the Arbonesse and Shadow is such that one might slip inadvertently between the planes without even realizing it, making it a dangerous place for the unwary.

Arbonesse Forest

The Arbonesse is one of the great forests of Midgard, larger than the holdings of the city-states of the Seven Cities. It is primarily deciduous, with oaks, hawthorns, and elms, with swatches of birch and maple and a relatively open underbrush of ferns and carpets of moss. The forest is dotted with open meadows, often marked with dolmens or faerie rings. For centuries, it has been the home of a group of elves who never answered the Last Horn and their descendants—the Arbonesse exiles.

The Arbonesse exiles live in small communities throughout the forest, in roughly the same populations as human thorps or villages. These self-reliant communities survive off hunting, gathering, and farming, and also have a rich ceremonial and cultural life. The elves of the Arbonesse know they are the heirs of the once-great masters of this land. They swear fealty to the Imperatrix, and upon occasion dispatch light units for her petty wars, but they expect little in return.

Not all of the Arbonesse Forest is friendly to natives of Midgard. Large regions have been seized by the shadow fey for their own purposes, and these areas are shunned and avoided by the elves of the Arbonesse. A new Dread Walker has taken up residence in the west (see Chapter 8). In addition, with the exception of the River Court, the old cities of Arbonesse have been abandoned and overrun with wild animals. The Arbonesse exiles protect these sites from raiders and on occasion explore them, seeking items to trade with the Lords Arcane of Dornig.

River Court

The River Court has lost some of its luster, but it remains the closest approximation of an active city in the elven lands. Notably, it is not built on the site of any known previous city, and the fey roads that lead between it and

RIVER COURT OF ARBONESSE

Symbol: A green shield with wavy silver divider: a golden sun rises from the river, a silver horn hangs under it

Ruler: Master of the River Road, Lord of the Exiles, His

Majesty Ulorian

he River King of the Arbonesse (CG male elf

: 12,400 (6,000 elfmarked, 6,000 elves (4,000 native),

es)

er Court, population 3,800 (2,100 elves, 600 fey

) elfmarked, 100 gnomes)

: Charun (patron), Yarila and Porevit, Bacchonol,

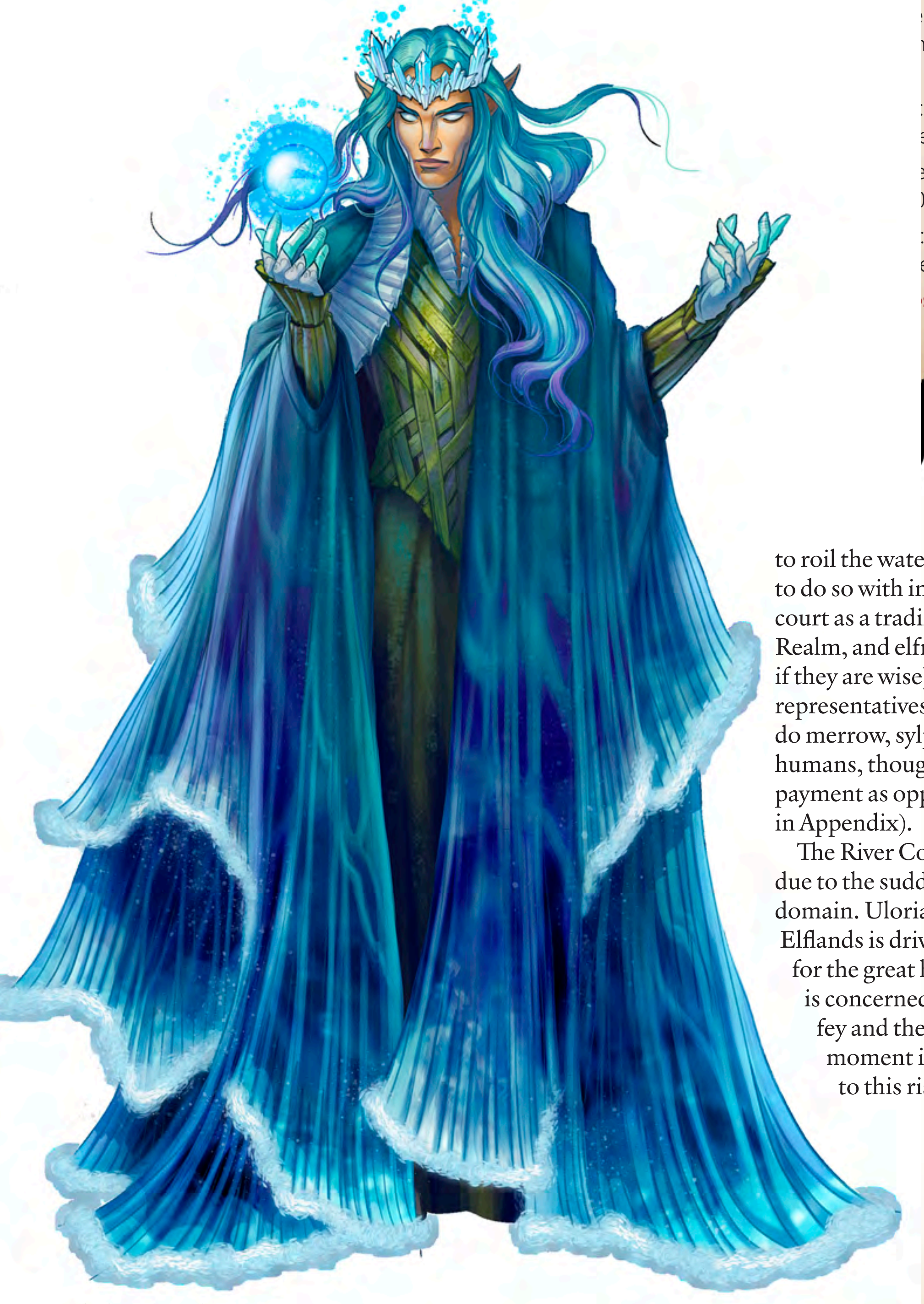
eyland (Volund)

s: Nuts, timber, elven silk, river wine, brandy wine

Elfheim are the shortest and most direct. Here the eldest elves (save for the Imperatrix herself) can be found, along with fey followers and creatures of the Elflands.

The River Court consists of a string of white stone citadels along the banks of the Neurabon River, with the River King's castle set in the middle of the river. The land around these citadels has been cleared for cultivation, primarily grapes. The surprisingly rural and domestic area around these castles contains simple houses of a few rooms. Wide areas are set aside for amphitheaters for courtly and religious ceremonies, and the two are intertwined.

The River Court is ruled by Ulorian the First, though hi rulership is more attuned to his vested personal interests than any desire to command his kin. He holds the power to roil the waters of the Neurabon, and the temperament to do so with increasing frequency. He has established the court as a trading post between this world and the Blessed Realm, and elfmarked merchants (with elven escorts, if they are wise) bring goods from Reywald to deal with representatives from the far side of the fey roads. So too do merrow, sylphs, and other aquatic fey come to deal with humans, though they prefer magic and memories as their payment as opposed to gold and silver (see *memory philters* in Appendix).



The River Court has lost some of its power, primarily due to the sudden influx of pure-blooded elves into the domain. Ulorian wonders if something occurring in the Elflands is driving this return or if it is simply a longing for the great halls of old in Midgard. In particular, he is concerned about the growing power of the shadow fey and their Black Prince (see Chapter 11), but at the moment is undecided if he should resist or acquiesce to this rising power.

Tilted Tower

Far to the west, where the Tintager River flows into the sea, stands one of the tallest buildings in Midgard, now abandoned by its masters. Over a mile high, the Tilted Tower is made of green glass that catches the sunlight. Its glittering spar can be seen up to 100 miles out to sea, even on cloudy days. During the Mage Wars, when the humans called up the abominations that destroyed much of the old elven lands, a group of venerable elven sorcerers (each older than the Imperatrix is now) stopped the sinking of the land, which would have consumed the entire forest of Arbonesse. They paid for that spell with their lives, and now their tower stands on the edge of the sea.

Indeed, it leans over the sea, since the ground on its seaward approach has settled and eroded, and the tower has a noticeable cant of about 15 degrees. In some ways it appears less a tower than one part of a great broken arch that extends over the sea to the north.

Ascanlia, the Court of Scandal

Known more as a legend than as a real place, Ascanlia is a great mount that once was an elven citadel of living stone. It has long since collapsed upon itself, and its perimeter is patrolled by gargoyles made of volcanic rock. The collapse is tunneled with burrows, and within these burrows the Deichon Court of the shadow elves claims suzerainty.

The center of these barrows contains a great hall hosting a perpetual celebration. The prisoners of the court are forced to dance and sing for their masters until they perish—either of ennui or suicide—at which point their bodies are animated to serve those roles until they are too decayed, whereupon they are turned into sweetmeats served to the guests by demonic servants. A golden throne called the Prophet's Chair set with volcanic glass features at the court. However, it is unoccupied, since the various clans among the shadow elves are too deeply engaged in internal conflicts and assassinations for anyone to dare claim it. It is said that once a single ruler holds that throne for a year and a day, the shadow fey will march against the River Court and conquer all of Arbonesse.

The passages out of this great hall loop back on themselves and follow paths not possible in the real world. Without doubt these hallways reach into the Shadow Realm, since creatures of shadow haunt the corridors. They also grant access to distant citadels of the shadow fey, so that any of their rulers can be found here. It is not a place where mortals are welcome or tolerated.

The Gentle Rest

The Gentle Rest cannot be located on any map. A fortified inn that wanders throughout the Arbonesse and Shadow Realm, to a traveler it looks like a small, walled way station with a wooden stockade surrounding a two-story tavern and several outbuildings. Inside, the fire burns in the common room's hearth, dinner is always about to be served, the ale is crisp and fresh, and the beds in the upper floor are soft. The staff consists of elves who go only by their titles ("Server," "Cook," "Stableboy") and the clientele is primarily elven, though it includes a number of lost souls who have wandered into the forest or into Shadow and cannot otherwise escape.

The Gentle Rest supposedly appears to travelers at the end of their ropes, who have exhausted their supplies or are fleeing a greater foe. The house has a stated policy against violence among the guests, and those who break it find themselves back where they started, the inn nowhere

The White Hart

Reports from Arbonesse, by elfmarked and humans and even fey, indicate that a luminous white deer with ornate horns has been spotted in the depths of the forest. The hart was originally spotted only fleetingly, but with increasing regularity over the past three years. The Arbonesse exiles seek to protect the creature, but hunting parties from Allain and shadow elves have been stalking the beast. It has shown a great deal of intelligence, eluding its pursuers by leading them into the path of greater opponents. The general theory in court claims this magical creature strayed out of Shadow for some particular purpose.

The general theory is not far wrong. The White Hart is an antlered female, and she is the spirit of the Imperatrix, whose mortal form slumbers in Reywald. She left her body to wander the Arbonesse, to investigate the sudden increase of elves in the area. She found she could not return to her body, and for a time was lost, living as a wild animal.

She has regained some of her identity, but now the Arbonesse faces a new threat—the abomination known as Y'gurdraketh. Its infestation of the Arbonesse exists on this plane and in related planes, and she can see it and battle it. Now she lures warriors from both Allain and Dornig into positions where they can repel the onslaught of the Walker.

The Imperatrix has recovered much of her knowledge, but she still does not know how to return to her own body. She trusts to her servants to keep it safe until she can find her way back. In the meantime, agents of the Black Prince and others seek her out, hoping to hang her trophy on their walls.

to be found and their pursuers close. A guide (named "Guide") can take travelers by the fey roads to any town, keep, shrine, or other location in Arbonesse and Dornig that has a gate.

Those who have found and left the Gentle Rest might attempt to return but find only elven ruins at its former location. Those who wait for it to return wait a long time.

Tomierran Forest

In the eastern half of this once-great elven domain lies the Tomierran, a different sort of forest entirely. The Arbonesse is still populated by the descendants of the elves, but Tomierran has been abandoned completely. The call for the Great Retreat came from the Towers of Thorn, and within the day, it is said, there were no longer any elves within the forest's boundaries. It is a place of ancient trees and weathered ruins. The great magic of the elves runs deep in these places, and there are towns within where time has stopped entirely. The food on the tables is still warm from when the elves rose from the table at the sounding of the horn, never to return again.

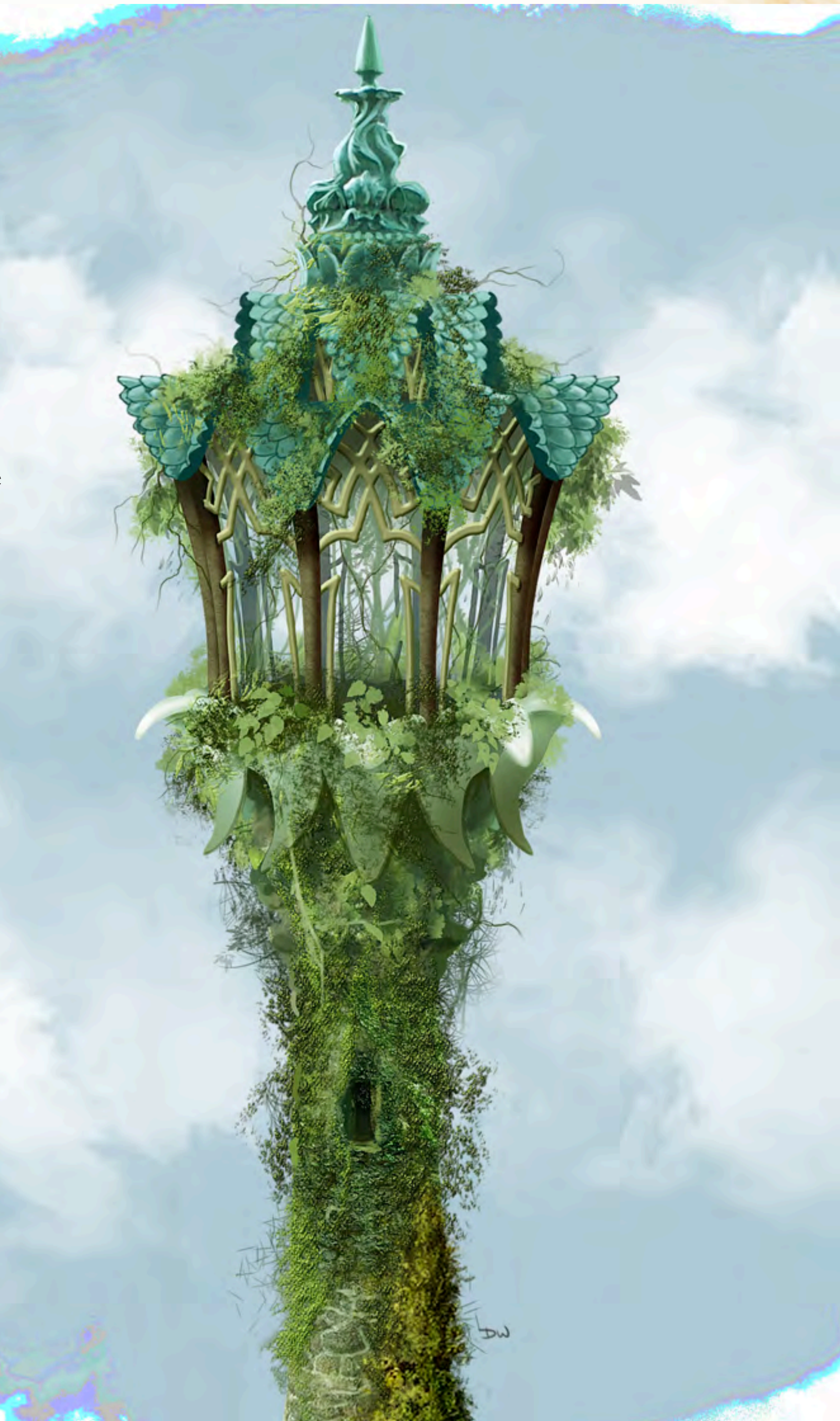
Tomierran is a land of magical monsters and animated plants, the remains of elven arcane experiments. Treants, dryads, and moss lurkers are commonly sighted here, along with free-willed elementals and magical creations such as owlbears and perytons. These are the guardians of the secrets of the elves.

At Thorn's heart stands a corrupt and rotting World Tree. For miles around no wholesome beast or bird stirs, and the whispers of Thorn's tree always seem malevolent. Its twisted foliage hides malformed and unnatural things. Like beetles infesting a rotting stump, they are symptoms of the sickened tree—things that Never Were or Might Have Been, ghosts of unrealized realities and creatures spawned of untaken choices. The weave of fate is threadbare here. Holda's Tree is barely alive, though in recent years a few elven druids have been seen tending to it.

The Tomierran Forest was for centuries the Imperatrix's personal demesne, with trespassers and fortune-hunters found within its borders subject to the full extent of the law. The forest is now an official holding of the church of Yarila and Porevit, but the rules against looters remain in force. Those who are caught must hand over their recovered treasures and share whatever knowledge they might have gained. Official explorations were once sponsored by the Lords Arcane and heavily influenced by the Aldous-Donner clan of Reywald, but these have (officially) stopped by order of Saintmistress Rowanmantle. Church-sanctioned explorations are still launched out of Thornguard, while shadier, more independent attempts depart from the Imperial Conservatory at Tomierau.

Ruins of Thorn

In ancient days, Thorn was the glittering capital of the elves of the Summer Lands. Towers spiraled up through the canopy, palatial halls were pillared by living trees, and dancing lights illuminated the gleaming Archon Court in rainbow hues. Then the dwarves brought it all crashing down. Reaver dwarves naturally had an uneasy relationship with their elven neighbors, who worshipped rivals of their own divine patrons. At first they came like many other supplicant races, to bathe in the glory of the court—though they saw little that impressed them. Soon, however, they learned of mithral and hungered for it in ever greater quantities. It was only a matter of time before trade became tribute, tribute became strife, and strife became all-out war.



Dwarven leaders claimed the war was divinely sanctioned, but for many it was about control of the mithral mines. They didn't care about conquering the elves, only taking what valuables they could carry and stripping the mines. To the outrage of elves and their allies, everything else was burned. The elves rebuilt Thorn to even greater heights around its World Tree, but the elves have never forgiven this first great affront by the dwarves.

Thorn and the Great Retreat

The gem of the Tomierran Forest, Thorn was the seat of government for the Archon Court when the Great Retreat began, legendary for its power and splendor. The retreating elves took little with them, and despite the stated protection of the throne of Dornig, the spires of this wondrous city have long beckoned treasure hunters and raiders.

However, the retreating elves left behind their guardians, their traps, and their magic that twists the nature of time to foil those who seek to profit from their departure. Between the World Tree and the traps, Thorn is a deadly proposition for the treasure hunter.

Thorn was the site of a great deal of magical experimentation, so magical beasts of all shapes and sizes as well as animated plants stalk the wide lanes of this huge city. These creatures know the area well and avoid the traps laid by their former masters. Many still remember the elves and are aware of the pain that the mages of the Archon Court used to rule lesser creatures. Given a chance, they seek vengeance against all who stride into their domains.

The buildings of Thorn are also filled with traps activated before the elves' departure, ranging from traditional pits and spikes to unsleeping magical guardians that can only be turned aside by a particular pass phrase selected by a priest now long departed from this world. Some of the fleeing elves left the city forever upon the sounding of the horn of the Great Retreat, but others activated old runes and set spells and mechanical traps on the off chance that they would return. Time has reduced some of these traps, but many survive due to a mighty enchantment worked within Thorn.

Warped Time of Thorn

That enchantment is a warping of time. Many regions have been held in temporal stasis waiting for a living creature to enter them again. Meals are warm from 500 years ago, and perfume in the chambers of ancient elven maidens still smells sweet. By the same token, beasts left behind for later retrieval are also present, waiting for their masters' return or to defend the household against intruders.

Other areas operate at different time scales, so that a treasure hunter might emerge from a building to find not only his companions gone but his family long dead. Others might strive against the traps and tricks of Thorn for years, only to emerge to a world where a day has passed.

These spells are lost to the Lords Arcane, though they are interested in learning more. Among other reasons, the church seeks to gain control of the forest to keep the families from playing with forces about which they are insufficiently knowledgeable.

Lost Mithral Mines

Legends say that somewhere in the ruins of Thorn lay subterranean grottos of outstanding beauty. These partly natural, partly worked exquisite caverns were a wonder of the ancient world. Lit by sparkling gemstones and mithral that glitters in the slightest illumination, their walls are carved with delicate gypsum flowers dusted with powdered gemstone. Groves stand columned by forests of carved adamantine trees hung with jeweled fruits.

A few mines were lost to dwarven pillagers, but most were sealed and hidden, guarded by potent wards and curses, and tireless constructs that rise at the least provocation. The elves rue the day they first showed mithral to the world.

Raven Tower

The Raven Tower has been despoiled many times in the history of Dornig. Each time, it has been certain that all its tombs have been emptied, all its vaults plundered, and the creatures within have been cowed. Yet with each generation—about fifty years—reports come out of the area of new discoveries and troves of orichalcum coins marked with the symbol of the Raven. A new cycle of investigations begins. Tombs not on any map suddenly appear, towers shift locations, and traps reset. This effect might be related the temporal magic of Thorn or something entirely different.

The crows, ravens, and magpies that infest this area remain the same. Collectively they are called the deathbirds, and their swarming multitudes fill the sky regardless of the season. They are the true keepers of the Raven Tower and its surrounding region, and wise adventurers leave them to it. The followers of Wotan in the Donnermark, however, consider the site a holy place of Wotan, and every so often they attempt a pilgrimage to the site.

Stone Galleries

Situated on the eastern border with Krakovar, the Stone Galleries are noted for their statuary, whose numbers continue to increase despite the lack of any sculptors present. The city consists of broad plazas and canals now dry and overgrown, bedecked with statues in positions of horror.

The area is a breeding ground of basilisks and cockatrices, and the underground passages are controlled by medusa sorcerers. Numerous military expeditions have been staged through the years, the most recent being the Great Stone Purge of 30 years ago. The heads of 17 basilisks, 25 cockatrices, and a dozen medusae were presented to the Imperatrix, along with the petrified forms of two dozen men. The bulk of these have large bites taken out of their bodies, and some have heads missing and as such are in storage until a safe method of recovery can be found. Those few who returned to living state are bandits and tomb raiders who lost some 40 years of their lives, and they state that the last thing they remember was a sudden noise and a horrid visage turning them to stone.

Despite these regular raids, a strong presence of petrifying creatures remains. The Lords Arcane believe that some greater power, perhaps demonic in nature, might be at work here. As a result, agents from undead-occupied Krakovar have been spotted in the area, and the church has been seeking adventurers to monitor the situation.

BEACH OF THORNS

The Beach of Thorns was originally a sheltered bay with a shoal of smooth black rocks, used by the Northerners seeking to explore and loot the abandoned elven settlements. Such attempts were usually repulsed by the forest, making it a landing only for the desperate or the foolhardy.

Over the past decade, in response to the increased pressure from the Church of Yarila and Porevit to control access to the old elven lands, a ramshackle settlement has appeared on the beach. Or rather, just off the beach. Entrepreneurs drove pilings of felled lumber into the muck of the bay, establishing a small trading village on this wooden foundation. They oversee a thriving illicit trade in artifacts, and the Beach of Thorns provides access to those who seek an alternative way into the elven lands.

LOST ARBONESSE

Dornig's third great forest is hidden from the world. Before the Mage Wars, the forest of Lost Arbonesse extended to the north and west of the current forest. This was a great land of ancient elven cities, compared to which the River Court would be considered a mere hunting lodge. More than 400 years ago, the great beast known as the Isonade rose from the depths and consumed this western forest, dragging it beneath the waves.

The land was assumed lost under the Isonade's assault, but much survived the wreckage. The shoreline along the northwest coast is lined with ruins, and the lowest tides reveal not only foundations, but entire preserved stump forests that lurk beneath the waves. These sentinel trees make landfalls difficult all along this coast and inadvertently keep the surviving Arbonesse elves free of attacks by Northern reavers.

The shoreline is said to be haunted, and mariners who travel this area speak of ghost voices on quiet nights and the tolling of bells long since submerged. Banshees move across the surface, looking for lost loves and taking tribute from any ship that crosses their path. The land beneath the waves is a tumult of wreckage from the Isonade's attack. The elven cities that existed here have been churned to rubble, and what little of the great forest survived is kept pristine by the depths. Ghosts swim here as well as darker things, such as sahuagin that moved up from deeper waters, their kingdoms destroyed by the mages' folly. Small tribes of aquatic elves lurk here too, though it is not known if they are original inhabitants of the Arbonesse who have been magically transformed or immigrants from other regions.

And in its greatest depths, the Isonade is said to slumber still. Grievously wounded in the wars that it was awakened to fight, the behemoth retreated back into the depths. Some say that the creature perished, and its skull now serves as the throne room of a sahuagin lord. Others say that the Isonade rests and dreams of the day when it will be roused again and take all the Arbonesse, and most of Midgard, with it beneath the waves.

THE SUMMER LANDS

Elven culture has declined in Dornig, but it thrives in the Summer Lands, a parallel world where the fey rule over their gnome, goblin, and halfling servitors, and dragonborn, humans, and kobolds are visitors at best. The current court there has ruled for more than 400 years. His Royal and Merciful Majesty King Valeshi IX remains in good humor despite a never-ending cavalcade of diplomacy, state pageantry, and stultifying financial and arcane arrangements. His friends and relatives call him "Falcon" or "Grandfather." He dotes on his beloved bride and star, Her Radiant and Keen-Eyed Majesty Queen Haldifelli III, sometimes called Sifsdottir for her love of that goddess of archery and ale—and her own profound skill with a bow, with which she won her husband's hand. Though the king and queen are aging and often retire from the great seasonal balls to their chambers promptly at midnight, the younger set at the Summer Lands court remains magnificently vibrant.

The next generation is led by their six children (especially the heir to the throne, His Serene Highness, Crown Prince Raymarran "Oak" Sommerrau) and nine grandchildren, including the Imperatrix of Dornig. In addition, the royal family includes 27 great-grandchildren, 81 great-great-grandchildren, and four great-great-great-grandchildren, many of them holding titles as generals, priests of the pantheon, wardens of various lands, and ambassadors to other courts. One of these, the young wizard Dolpharran "Dagger" Sommerau, recently renounced his royal title and left the Summer Lands, some believe to take up with dark forces in the Courts of the Shadow Fey. Others believe he plots a return of direct elven rule to Dornig or Valera.

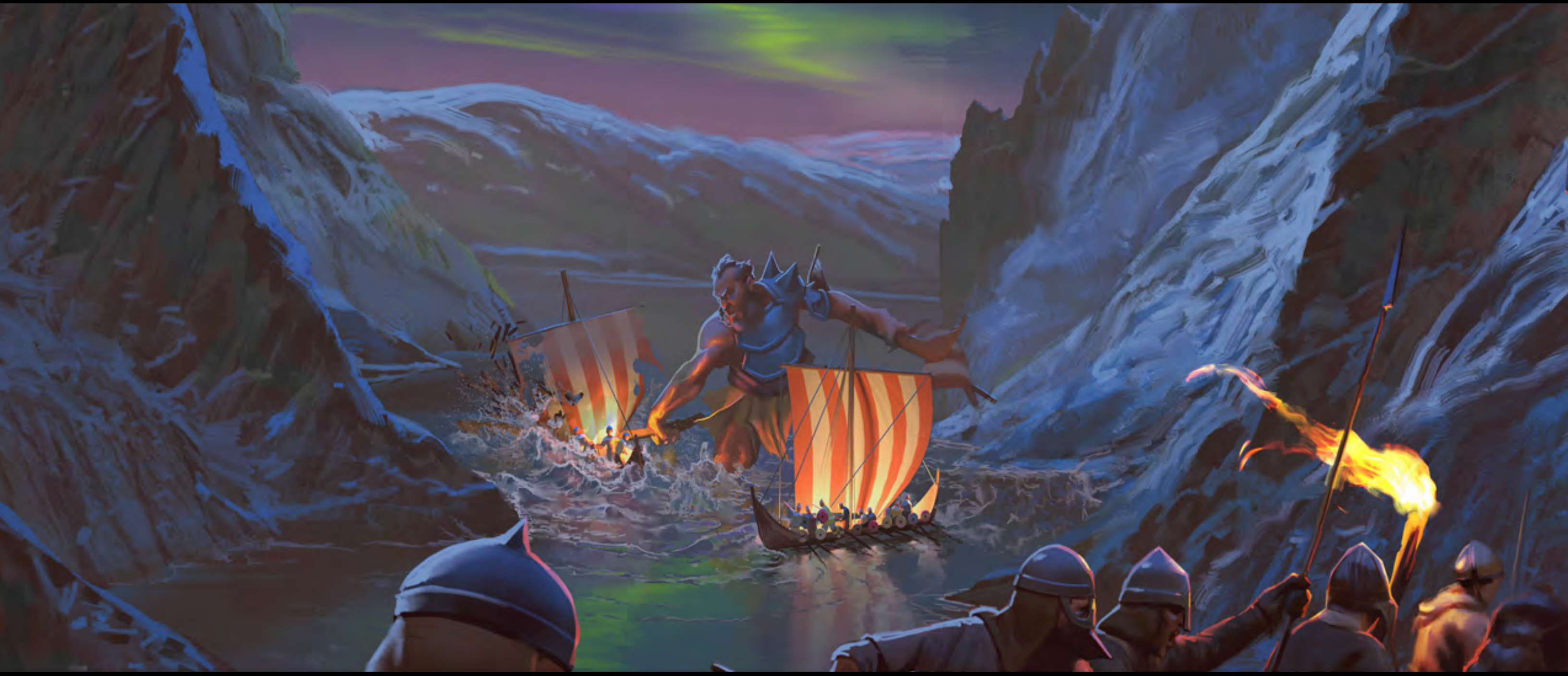
Visitors to the court require potent letters of introduction, high Status, or rich gifts to make significant headway. The elves of the Summer Court (like their counterparts the shadow fey) are deeply involved with their own concerns, lands, and people, and strangers without significance to those concerns find themselves politely wined, dined, and ignored.

NORTHLANDS

10

In the North, life is harder than south of the Nieder Straits. In the fjordlands, running out of firewood doesn't mean a chill night, but exposure to bone-wracking cold or a trip into the dark and dangerous forest for kindling. Everyone from king to lowly thrall must work hard daily to survive. A life of indolence is unheard of—and impossible without help from powerful magic. Work-shy characters aren't just lazy; they're ostracized as threats to the community.

People of the North are practical and independent, energetic, and inured without complaint to the hardships of life. No central authority demands taxes or a cut of a party's loot, but at the same time no one reins in the excesses of monsters and unscrupulous rulers. When bandits or trolls or a jarl's bullying huskarls come prowling, it's down to each family and their friends to choose fight or flight. Death comes to all sooner or later, for no matter how well prepared and defended, nothing lives one moment longer than it's fated.



LAND OF DEADLY BEAUTY

Nature is more dangerous than the most savage band of raiders. Deadly creatures lurk in dark pine forests, blizzards and snowdrifts can isolate farms and towns for months at a time, and the temperature plummets to a deadly chill during the winter months. Even daylight, the oldest defense against ghosts and skulking horrors, dims as the year ends and dooms people to huddle around their fires and stare nervously into the dark.

For all its harshness and hazards, however, the North is indisputably, breathtakingly beautiful. Frost glitters in the morning sun, making the world shine as if coated with diamonds. Waterfalls thunder over cliffs, cascading down through an unearthly haze of mist and rainbows. The land's beauty inspires countless poems and songs, but for those lost and starving in the wilderness, the allure can be deadly, dulling the mind to approaching danger.

Humans, dwarves, and ravenfolk hold the line against raiding giants, but the struggle is difficult and sometimes towns disappear between one year and the next.

LIFE IN THE NORTHLANDS

Outside of family and clan, felag is the strongest bond in society. It means "fellowship" and "partnership" and is linked to the power of the Fé rune, which represents division of wealth. A felag oath-taker swears to loyally support one's chieftain and fellow warriors in a sacred bond between companions. This oath defines the felag's aims, its right to depose and elect leaders, and fair division of the spoils.

Most Northlanders are karls, free farmers and artisans—and part time raiders and traders—who answer only to themselves. Unlike their counterparts in the feudal hierarchies of the south, homesteaders aren't bound to a local lord by anything but their own choices and oaths. Karls who directly serve a lord are known as huskarls ("karls of the house") and make up a lord's chief allies, administrators, and personal bodyguard. A wise lord is free with gifts and opportunities for glory, else a few karls may look elsewhere for a patron. The blandishments of Loki, Boreas, giants, or the trollkin sometimes win over a karl far out on the cold margins of civilization.

Above karls are chieftains, jarls, and kings—nobles defined not by bloodline or divine provenance but followers, ships, and estates.

Sometimes the North has many kings and sometimes it has none, but rarely do they unify more than a relatively small area, and never for more than a generation or two. Royalty attracts more than enough rivals, invaders, and pretenders to stymie any ruler's power, and successions are always disputed. Kingship is not regarded as especially sacred or special. Some rulers might claim descent from [redacted] favor), but success is the only real measure of nobility in the North.

In the lowest social class are the thralls or slaves, prisoners of war or unfortunates kidnapped by raiders or bound servants unable to pay their debts. Most thralls lead hard lives, but some rise from such depths. Everyone respects triumph over adversity, and good slaves are considered part of the family, sharing its hardships and successes with everyone else. Karls often free their slaves, either in their wills or by treating them as freed villagers as the years go on. Social order is fluid and defined by one's actions: kingship and jarldom are forged through war and adventure, not guaranteed by bloodline.

CUSTOMS OF THE NORTH

The unyielding landscape hammered Northern life into its current shape. The surroundings define its people far more than race—the societies of humans, dwarves, giants, and others share much in common. They approach life with the same bullish mindset, worship in a similar fashion, and follow roughly the same customs. Humans can travel to a trollkin steading or a goblin hall with reasonable expectations of proper etiquette.

Still, each species exhibits prejudices and preferences, muddying the waters of tradition and adding unexpected twists that can form the basis of adventures. Jotuns rarely think it unfair to challenge guests to giant-sized games of strength for example, while kobold Þings (see below) are notorious for backstabbing politics, and what's on the table at a troll feast might not be palatable to other races . . . although it's still rude not to eat. The most common shared customs involve honor and reputation, ospitality and feasting, the Þing, wergild and duels, and he infamous reaver raid.

Once Northlanders sail south, however, these customs ight be left in their wake as circumstance, company, and onvenience dictate. Certainly those on the receiving end f a raid have no recourse to any protections offered by Northlands mores.

This is not to say that those from the Northlands simply run wild when far from home. When engaged in trade, the Northlanders' familiarity with foreign customs often catches southerners off guard, surprised by just how cosmopolitan these warlike people turn out to be.

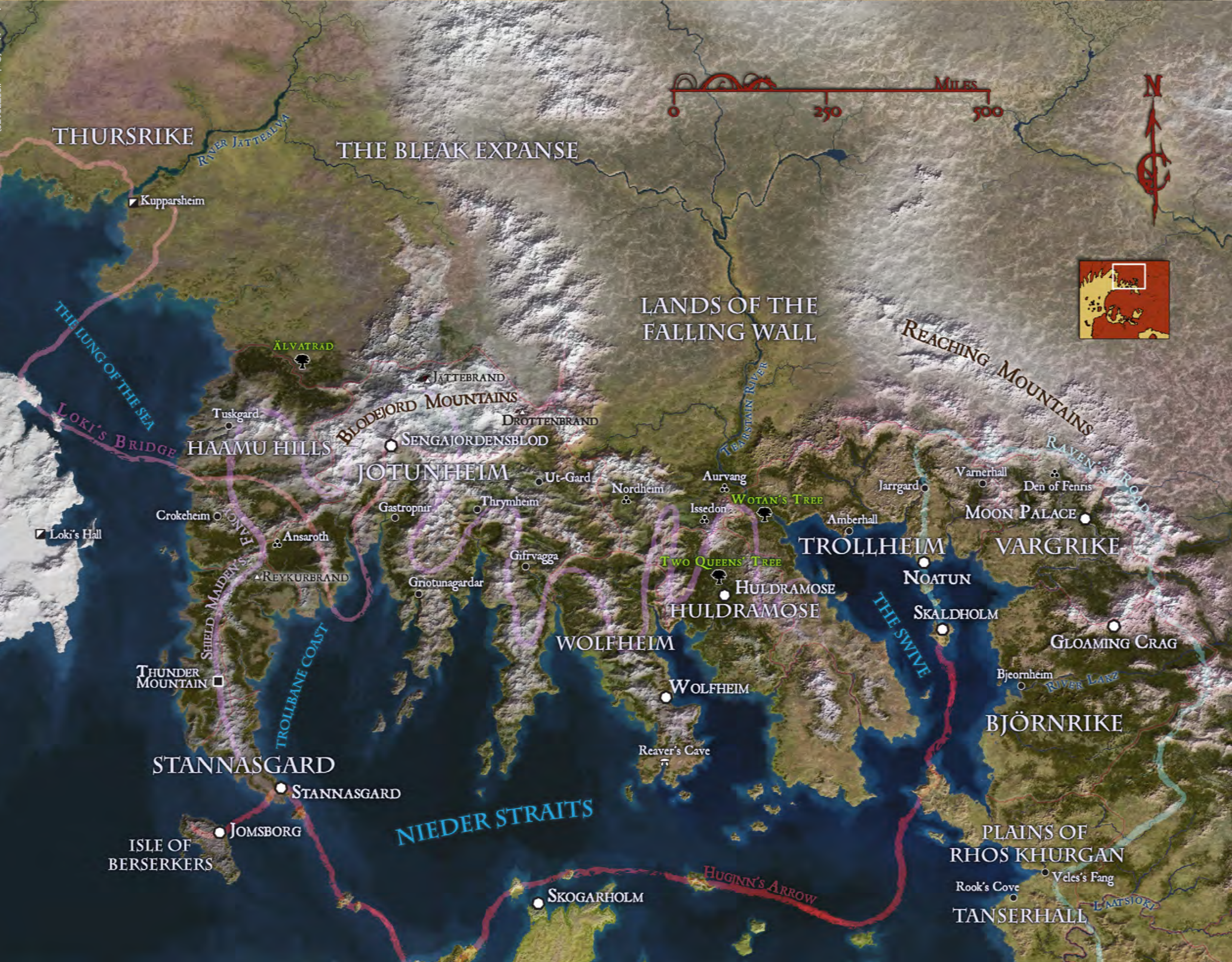
HONOR AND REPUTATION

Reputation is everything. Warriors tell tales of old comrades and adventures, and skalds sing of deeds both valorous and vile. Passing news and gossip is a common pastime from thralls to kings. Desire for a good reputation compels men and women to acts of generosity, valor, and hospitality, while ill-repute is rightly feared and the taint of dishonor difficult to shed. Northlanders have a prickly sense of honor: a good name is all that remains after death, so most people don't just want to do the right thing, they want to be seen doing it.

NORTHLANDERS SAILING SOUTH

[redacted] dwarves in mercenary companies and as wizards' bodyguards in the more civilized and temperate lands to the south. Northlanders do not care how far they travel to go a-viking, as long as there is battle, plunder, and glory to be had. Mages know that Northlanders make loyal, oath-bound bodyguards, happy to leap into savage battle. The lords of Dornig also find that Northern barbarian warriors make excellent shock troops and loyal retainers if they are kept well supplied with battle, gold, and mead.

The Khazzaki are contemptuous of warriors who prefer wooden longships over reliable horses, but Northern mercenaries find work in the Kingdom of Vidim and even as far south as the Ruby Despotate. Northland warriors even find a place in the mercenary companies of the Septime Cities and among the akinji and other troops of the Mharoti Empire.


THURSRIKE
River Jatteälva
Kupparsheim
THE BLEAK EXPANSE
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250
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LANDS OF THE FALLING WALL
Reaching Mountains
Tearstain River
Raven's Road
The Lung of the Sea
Loki's Bridge
Älvatrad
Jattebrand
Blodfjord Mountains
Drottenbrand
Tuskgard
HAAMU HILLS
Sengajordensblod
JOTUNHEIM
Ut-Gard
Nordheim
Aurvang
Wotan's Tree
Issedon
Jarrgard
Varnerhall
Den of Fenris
Moon Palace
Amberhall
TROLLHEIM
VARGRIKE
Crokeheim
Loki's Hall
Gastropnir
Thrymheim
Ansaroth
Fang
Gifrvagga
Two Queens' Tree
Huldramose
Noatun
Reykurbrand
Griotunagardar
HULDRAMOSE
The Swive
Skaldholm
Gloaming Crag
Shield Maiden's
WOLFHEIM
Thunder Mountain
Wolfheim
Trollbane Coast
Bjeornheim
River Lakz
BJÖRNRIKE
Reaver's Cave
STANNASGARD
Stannasgard
Jomsborg
ISLE OF BERSERKERS
NIEDER STRAITS
PLAINS OF RHOS KHURGAN
Veles's Fang
Rook's Cove
Huginn's Arrow
Skogarholm
TANSERHALL
Laatsjoki

Honor isn't the same as goodness, however. Wicked reavers are considered honorable, and some good Northlanders are known as níðingr (honorless) for abandoning the crueler Northern customs. Regardless of alignment, an honorable man or woman is generous in gifting and hospitality, fair-minded in judgments, and fearless in battle. The ability to uphold such values can keep even the truly malevolent in good favor with the gods, and the ability to subvert such customs to meet one's goals draws the favor of the more devious among the deities.

Cleverness and wit are also essential—Northlanders should be able to recite poetry, evade the tempers and tantrums of the gods, and be considered cunning by allies and enemies alike. Northlanders take life stoically, calm in even the worst of circumstances. They know no human or god escapes their fate, and complaining is pointless.

The Þing

The democratic traditions of the North surprise many an outlander. Families and neighbors sort out local matters among themselves, but every region also has a regular meeting called a Þing (pronounced "thing") that combines court and trade fair. Northlanders meet to settle quarrels, make vows of peace or war, forge new alliances, celebrate great deeds, and invoke ancient laws. A council of wise law-speakers and jarls oversees debates and attempts to broker satisfactory settlements, but all the discussions are public and all free people can have their say.

Much in the North is decided by the influence of local lords and bullies, but big decisions need public approval—although intimidation and backstabbing goes on behind the scenes. Even peaceful times see arguments to settle and feuds to avert, so the Þing's law-speakers constantly rule on hunting and pasturage rights, debts unpaid and stolen thralls or cattle, and even kidnapping and murder. If agreement and recompense cannot be reached, injured parties rely on the sanctity of the duel or the declaration of a feud.

The Þing also provides an opportunity for trading and the disposition of raid booty. Families bring slaves, cloth, fine weapons, cattle and oxen, salt, wax, hides, raw materials, or a variety of hand-crafted household goods to offer in trade. Master artisans, rune masters, and wizards also prowl the Þing for customers, and in a region with few cities it's the best opportunity for wealthy Northlanders to lay their hands on exotic or magic items. Distant kings and powerful jarls sometimes send both warriors and silver-tongued bards to the Þing to safeguard their interests.

Locals despise such sly emissaries, and it's not uncommon for such folk to have their heads removed and sent back to their masters as a message that communities prefer to manage their own affairs. These actions and duels are the only violence permitted at the Þing, although most attendees consider it a poor event if fewer than three or four people travel the hel-road during a moot. Death is great entertainment, a fine sacrifice, and a good way to remind everyone of the usefulness of the peace of the Þing.

Most Þings take place at a traditional spot: a sacred glade, blessed rock, World Tree, or other hallowed location. Borders are a common locale, allowing rival regions to remain separate between debates. A nearby hall might host prominent visitors, but most people camp in the surrounding fields. Divinely sent afflictions and public condemnation await those who break the truce.

Justice, Feuds, and Wergild

A Northlander's concept of justice can be hard to define. Relatively few actions are considered crimes—most involve theft or dishonoring someone's good name—and "justice" is synonymous with compensation or avoiding a feud, not some abstract idea of right or wrong. Assuming the wrongdoers have not committed an especially heinous crime (treachery, for example), the accused might not be treated as criminals by the populace at large, or even by their victims. Fines known as wergild are the usual punishment, paid by the offenders to the victim or their family (traditionally in the form of silver rings), and in exchange the victim and the victim's kin both swear to let the matter drop.

Holmganga (Dueling)

Questioning someone's honor, accusing them of a crime or of cowardice, or falsely claiming credit for heroic deeds is asking for a fight. Sometimes it happens by accident—especially at drunken feasts—and Northlanders laugh off such offenses once a sincere apology is given. But sometimes only bloodshed can heal wounded pride.

If the offender fails to publicly apologize for the offense within three days, a duel called a holmganga ("going to the island") results. Such duels typically occur on an island, at a crossroads, in a sacred glade, or on a cloth staked to the ground. Each warrior can take personal arms, armor, and three shields to the dueling ground. Breaking a shield or throwing it down ends a "round" of fighting, allowing a brief respite (no more than a minute) to catch one's breath. The fight ends only when one combatant flees or cannot continue.

Honorable folk of all professions are expected to duel when necessary. If a duel is grossly mismatched, a champion can fight in one's place or the defender can appeal to the local Þing and petition to have the duel declared unfair. Failure to show up earns a reputation as a nithling (coward) and outlawry for a year or two.

Feuds

If debate or holmganga cannot resolve an issue (or neither party is interested in trying them), then a feud begins. Immediate and extended family, neighbors, and the victim's friends are expected to avenge them by inflicting the same woes on the criminal and all nearby kin. Sometimes the motivation is a genuine sense of justice; more often it's an excuse for robbery and murder.

Feuds rapidly get out of hand as each side calls in debts, creating an ever-expanding circle of violence (and more wergild needed to settle it) that can go on for generations.

Pressure from the Þing can sometimes end feuds, but otherwise they continue until one side flees the area, is destroyed beyond capacity to strike back, or—rarely—both sides weary of continual bloodshed. All factions court adventurers to aid them, both officially and unofficially, and the call for allies or the duty of guests to their host are easy ways to embroil honorable characters in a conflict, sometimes on the wrong side. Even intervening to break up a fight can thrust an unwilling party into the feud—or become the cause of a fresh one.

Outlawry

Outlaws have been banished from honorable society. They are outcasts, sometimes by choice or circumstance but more commonly as a punishment. Beggars as well as respected jarls are declared outlaw for crimes. Literally "outside the law," they can be killed without penalty or fear of wergild or feud. Their families are supposed to treat outlaws as if they were dead, while strangers should not offer them hospitality or aid, treating them as they would a wolf scratching at their door. Sometimes a bounty is offered by the outlaw's victims, and jarls reward anyone who kills a known outlaw.

Outlawry is sometimes for life and sometimes for a
period—a year or three years or until the king or jarl v
declared it is dead. Outlawry applies only in the outla
local Þing or kingdom. Depending on the crime, an ou
might be ignored or even welcomed in neighboring la
Outlawry doesn't carry much stigma (it's an occupati
hazard for most adventurers), but the deed behind it n
reflect significantly on the outlaw's reputation.

TABLE 10–1: STATUS MODIFIERS FOR THE NORTHLANDS

Deed	Status Change
Made outlaw	–1
Owing wergild for a long time	–1
Wealthy and owing wergild	–2
Use black magic	–2
Break a sworn oath	–2
Break pledge of hospitality	–3
Break peace of the Þing	–4
Coward/nithling	–4
Go reaving	0
Bring plunder from reaving	+1
Kill your first troll	+1
Kill your first giant	+1
Win a duel	+1
Captain a reaving ship	+2
Kill your first dragon	+2

Feasting and Hospitality

Providing hospitality is one of the most important obligations of honor. A warm hearth, a hearty meal, and stout walls are the only respite from the dark and dangerous wilderness, and welcoming guests is one of the few ways to learn foreign news and gossip. How someone acts as a guest or a host is considered a telling mark of character. In exchange for the host's generosity, guests pay them back not with coin but by behaving themselves, defending their host from attack, and giving their own gifts (or aid in time of need) while staying beneath the host's roof. Even deadly enemies and monsters adhere to the laws of hospitality—or at least the letter of it.

Local notions of what's hospitable might not match the traveler's, however. From the farmer sitting down with family members and hired hands each night, to a jarl hosting her shield maidens and huskarls or a king celebrating a major religious festival, the communal meal is integral to Northern culture. At the feast table warriors get to know one another, deciding issues of status and building the camaraderie needed to survive as

Northerners view those who regularly shun communal meals with distrust—clearly they have something to hide. For kings, jarls, and prosperous karls, meals are taken in a specially built hall, a large building resembling the upturned hull of a longship. Here the lord and lady and their family receive guests, who judge a host by the hall and the hospitality offered in it.

Ale and mead is served in vast open barrels, ladled out by servants and ferried to drinkers who sit in order of status. Those most favored sit near the master of the hall, who sprawls on a thronelike chair wide enough for two people (the lord and his wife or leman). Everyone else rests on a bench. Attendees drink from hollow horns, specifically designed so that they cannot be set down without being emptied. Failing to do so is good cause for mockery, and drinking from a mug or flagon is considered suitable only for the very young or slaves and servants. Guests' weapons are kept nearby but not permitted at the feast; they would offer too many temptations for drunken diners to violate hospitality, bringing dishonor upon all concerned.

Northlanders have a justified reputation for enjoying strong drink as much as they enjoy battle—and the former leads to the latter when warriors gather together to feast, brag, and swap outlandish tales of daring. As the hours or even days pass by, words become slurred, tempers become frayed, and brawls or duels are a constant possibility.

A wise lord breaks up a long gathering with hunting and outdoor sports to prevent restlessness and give guests a change of scene. Skalds (bards) and other entertainers ease tensions, although more than a few lords enjoy watching guests fight.

Besides drink and brawls, popular entertainments include hunting (essential for keeping meat on the table during extended feasts) and hawking (considered "an old man's game"). Sagas and rhymes are common, dissolving into impromptu contests between audience and skald—a chance for all involved to show their talent and wit. Animal games, especially bear-baiting, cock fighting, and dog fighting are also common. A host is expected to give gifts to victorious contestants.

Many areas foster a specialty in some rough-but-mostly-friendly contest that visitors are expected to take part in. A wise guest finds out in advance what's locally considered "fun."

Inescapable Fate

The Norns weave destiny for god and mortal alike, and none escape their final doom. Everything in the world has a fate that cannot be evaded or denied. Baldur's dreams foretell his death and a hall awaits his coming in the Underworld. Wotan learned of Ragnarok many years before it will come to pass and knows that he will die with the jaws of the Fenris Wolf around his throat. His son, meanwhile, prepares for years crafting the weapon he knows will avenge his father. Northlanders don't believe in coincidence. When old friends or enemies meet, they give a knowing nod at their destined reacquaintance.

When an expedition is lost at sea or a companion killed, it was destiny. People's actions are predestined, their choices already woven, but Northerners travel through life with a cheerfully resigned attitude: it was meant to be, and good people struggle on as best they can and hope that a better thread of fate awaits them tomorrow. Curses and prophecies abound, yet stoic acceptance of one's doom is integral to the Northern character.

Chance doesn't play a great part in the Northern psyche, but luck is a different matter. Good or bad fortune isn't random but is tied to fate. "Luck" is how your destiny plays out and calling something lucky or unlucky is much the same as calling it good or bad. Charming men are called "woman-lucky" and good sailors are said to have "sea-luck." Because lucky men and fortunate women are signposts of fate, Northlanders ally with those favored by fate. Likewise, they distance themselves from unlucky people and items.

Machinations of Loki

Ragnarok has begun, or so it would seem were it not for the pronouncements of seers. The timing is wrong, the stars are not right, fulfillments of prophecy are too blatant. Nevertheless, a good many details foretold in ancient prophecy do seem to be coming to pass, and the voices of those calling for preparation in the face of the coming of Fimbulwinter and the deluge to follow have the ears of many. The doubt of seers who cannot sense the skeins of fate beyond the present provides little comfort.

What lies behind the confusion, and indeed the entire tale? None other than Loki, who has recruited both Boreas and Chernobog to his fell purpose. The three have brought about the birth of a Cult of Ragnarok, consisting of an assortment of creatures but primarily malevolent humans and giants, all with an interest in bringing about the end of the world or capitalizing on the chaos of a false Ragnarok. Allied with Chernobog's own apocalyptic Night's Cauldron cult, their following grew quickly and expanded across the Northlands. Working as a network, cultists spread false rumors of prophecies fulfilled and signs witnessed, convincing many of the impending doom of Ragnarok.

KNOWN RACES OF THE NORTHLANDS

The North is home to many other races besides the dwarven reavers and innumerable human clans. The giants are its most well-known inhabitants, claiming Jotunheim, a land that bubbles with primal energies. This is the last remnant of a much greater land (so they claim), destroyed by the gods shortly after the First War, when the Aesir and Vanir joined forces to crush their dreams of glory. Aside from its giant-sized geography and architecture, an understandable obsession with strength and size, and a hatred of the gods of Asgard, life in Jotunheim is much like anywhere else in the North in its mundane details.

Giants roam the Northlands in increasing numbers, and the ruins of isolated farmsteads offer mute testimony of their destruction. The ironworking thursir giants have been forging weapons at a feverish pace in service to their greater kin. Some say this is a sure sign of the coming of the Fimbulwinter, and smiths work day and night at their jarls' insistence to arm everyone capable of bearing the weight. Stores of grain are now guarded like treasuries in preparation for invasion and the coming of a deadly winter.

An offshoot of the giant race, trolls and trollkin are so prevalent that a whole region, Trollheim, is named after them. In the oldest dialect of the Northern Tongue, troll means both "supernatural evil" and "something hard to put an end to," a phrasing that sum up most peoples' view of them. Despite this reputation, Trollheim's trollkin are more sophisticated than their southern kin, dwelling in crude halls and adopting the shared customs of the North—with a dark and violent twist. Wilder than the meanest berserker, trollkin have carved out a reputation for monstrous violence and for being powerful, if unreliable, mercenaries when bribed with trinkets and strong drink. Trollkin are often witches and masters of grudge magic, willing to invoke curses and black magic for a price.

Trollkin raids inflict untold misery on the North's isolated villages and farmsteads. "Lucky" victims can buy off their attackers with tribute, but others leave behind only tales of broken bones and shattered timbers found where people once dwelt.

The fey are ubiquitous throughout the Northlands, from Björnrike to the shores of the Haamu Hills and as far north as anyone has dared to travel. It is a rare stretch of woods, lake, river, or stream that lacks a resident faerie creature, or a whole host of them. Certain varieties of fey are particular to the north; ice maidens wander the high frozen places, some with bands of fraughashar to do their bidding. Hags lurk in the cold bogs, hatching their vile plots against the innocent, and rum gremlins play havoc along the piers and docks or from hidden burrows beneath mead halls. Travelers are advised to learn the proper ways to pay their respects or otherwise avoid the endless variety of hazards and entanglements one risks when dealing with fey creatures.

KINGDOMS OF THE NORTH

The Northern kingdoms are small and numerous: it seems every jarl with a long hall and a few ships is a king. Indeed, many small settlements brag about their glorious land, timber, and fine fishing. With so many fjords and valleys, and so few willing to brave the winters, possession of land is a matter of the boldest claiming a place and the titles to go with it. Over time, many of these small kingdoms have grown into power, helped along by dwarven mining and magic, human resourcefulness and persistence, and the wise words of the huginn and the shield maidens of Thor. The kingdoms of the Northlands might be small, but each is a treasure to its people unlike any other.

BJÖRNRIKE, KINGDOM OF THE BEAR

Symbol: Beehive and bear paw

Ruler: King Mesikämmen, "Old Honey Paws" (LN male bearfolk ranger 8/druid 9)

Important Personages: Queen of Bjeornheim Yohana Honeyhair (NG female bearfolk); Ulla Argensdottir (NE female human)

Population: 28,525 (18,325 humans, 3,900 bearfolk, 3,200 dwarves, 1,900 werebears, 950 trylleri, 250 elfmarked)

Capital: Gloaming Crag, population 7,800 (6,100 humans, 950 bearfolk, 700 dwarves, 150 werebears)

Town: Bjeornheim, population 3,900

Great Gods: Bengta Bear Maiden (Lada, patron), Thor, Freyr and Freyja, Hod (Charun), Wotan

Trade Goods: Fish, honey, ale, mead, venison, berries, cider

The rolling hills and coastal plains south of the Reaching Mountains are claimed by the Kingdom of the Bear, which has no other name in humanoid tongues. The fey bears and werebears that reside here hold a wide region but the sparse population doesn't mind trespassers, as long as they respect the King of Bears and defer to his people when challenged. Common visitors include berserkers studying the Way of the Bear and druids and rangers seeking a superlative animal companion. A few unscrupulous adventurers hunt the inhabitants, since their furs are said to be magical proof against any cold.

A fair number of hulking, ursine adventurers go out into the world each year for fame, glory, a challenge, or to sate their curiosity about the world beyond Björnrike. Though the initial sight—and sometimes the second, and the third—of an armed and armored bear standing upright causes considerable trepidation, once one understands the ebb and flow of their temperament and always gives them the first portion of fish at mealtime, the bearfolk become formidable adventuring companions.

The king, a bearfolk named Mesikämmen, rules over a court of bear jarls and a cadre of witches and oracles. His royal court spends most of its time hunting in the hills near the capital and feasting, brawling, and drinking the finest honey mead from immense stone bowls. The King of Bears rules from Gloaming Crag, which thrusts out from the foothills of the Reaching Mountains like a petrified wave. A warren of caves and tunnels riddles its interior. Kingship is decided by yearly challenges, theoretically open to anyone, but Mesikämmen, known as "Old Honey Paws" for his taste for sweets and other indulgences, has defeated all comers for over 20 years.

The most cosmopolitan portion of the realm is the predominantly human town of Bjeornheim ("bear's city" in the Northern Tongue), which sits at the wide coastal delta of the River Lakz. Each spring vast hordes of salmon make their way upstream, attracting a legion of bear and human fisherfolk who compete, sometimes violently, for their share of the annual bounty. Aquatic monsters sometimes follow these shoals, disrupting the annual festival until heroes deal with them. Bjeornheim employs a unique defense against raiders: hives of ferocious bees ring the town, swarming out to attack anyone who threatens during the day. Only residents are immune to their stinging rampages, since they eat so much local honey that they smell of it and are accepted by the hives. At night semi-domesticated bears patrol with local lycanthropes, and they treat any creature walking on two legs with deep suspicion. Few dare to trouble the town, so Bjeornheim has earned a reputation as a safe place to make port.

Traders from Vidim and the exotic kingdoms of the Far East visit here, as well as centaurs and elves from the Rothenian Plain, Kariv wagons, and Khazzaki tribes. Like the hives that protect them, Bjeornheim is ruled by a queen: Yohana Honeyhair, an elderly but still golden-haired druid of the Bear Maiden (a bearfolk goddess of dawn and honey, often associated with Lada the Golden). Queen Yohana rules from Bee-Ulf Hall, overlooking the town. The mead brewed by her family is the finest ale in the North (made from local honey) and renowned as excellent portage ale. Each year many casks travel north in tribute to the Bear King, a tempting target for bandits.

Talk of omens and signs of Fimbulwinter are largely ignored by Mesikämmen, who remains unconvinced of their veracity, particularly due to the lack of outside threats. The current peace simply means the Cult of Ragnarok has been taking its time deciding how to attack Bjeornheim. Through the machinations of unscrupulous alchemists in their employ, the cultists are creating a balm that temporary wards off bees and made from their own honey, which the cult is procuring through discreet trade. Once Bjeornheim's defenses no longer function during the day, Old Honeypaws may find reason to change his assessment of signs and portents.

ADVENTURES IN BJÖRNRIKE

Adventures in Björnrike involve the intrigues of the Ursine Courts and attempts to steal their treasures.

- The guardian bees of Bjeornheim have begun to die off rapidly and mysteriously. The PCs must find the cause and a cure. Is this a prelude to an attack, perhaps by the agents of Boreas?
- The Bear King has announced a great contest to find the first spring bloom of the legendary Honey Lotus that grows in the steep hills above the Gloaming Crag. PCs must compete with bold centaurs, cunning elves, wily Kariv, and daring Khazzaki to win the golden prize.
- Old Honey Paws has decided Yohana would make a fine Bear Queen and mate for him. However, she has rebuffed his advances. The PCs are sent to woo her on his behalf. If they do their job too well, she falls for a party member, angering the Bear King.

The Bleak Expanse

The harshest and wildest of the Northern regions lies north of Jotunheim and the Reaching Mountains, where windswept white tundra stretches off to the end of the world. A land of ice so deep some say there's no ground beneath it, nor ever was. This is the Bleak Expanse, a desert of snow and ice where cruel Boreas rules supreme. Much of it is unmapped, unexplored, and all of it is rarely visited by humans, trollkin, or dwarves.

Yet some people do survive even here. The hardy human tribes called the skraelings live on the outskirts of the tundra and the frozen sea, evading the white bears, remorhazes, white dragons, and linnorms that also call the Expanse home. Legends claim lost palaces and tombs wallowed by Boreal ice, lush lost worlds, and great reasures buried beneath the snow, but most adventurers ind only death. It's easy to go astray in the tundra, where and and sky blur into a single white haze of snow and the mptiness causes despair and hallucinations.

Rearing out of the northernmost extension of the Bleak Expanse—hundreds of miles to the north—is the enormous mountain known as the Tower of the North Wind, or the Black Tower. This towering mountain strikes at the sky like a spear, taller than the highest peaks of Jotunheim. At its pinnacle, far above the clouds, rests the ice palace of the icy god Boreas, high enough to touch the stars and gaze down at the Boreal lights. Frozen souls dangle like icicles from its corridors, and the air seems frozen into lifelessness.

At the foot of the Black Tower sits Geskleithron, a metropolis carved entirely from ice. Snow white walls and bastions surround regal halls of blue ice and glasslike towers that loom high into the sky. The city is undeniably beautiful and a marvel of engineering, wrought exclusively from ice with skill that even frost giant artisans cannot match. Its markets trade in bottled storms for the distant followers of Azuran, as well as frozen mortal souls and memories frozen solid by the Boreal chill. Mortals can survive here, but only the elemental servants of Boreas are truly welcome.

To the south stands the Boiling Tower. A column of steam rises from the ice to mark it, visible for miles. For a mile in every direction around it the ice is replaced by boiling water, since the red stones of the tower are hotter than lava. Storms of raging thuellai perpetually circle it, howling in frustrated rage but unable to harm the occupant.

Auvindri Against-the-Wind lives here, a fire giant wizard who's surprisingly gregarious with visitors, with the exception of the servants of Boreas. His tower is an open act of defiance against the Devourer of the North, and Auvindri delights in rescuing travelers from Boreas's clutches. He provides a table of mulled wine and roasted bear to travelers who bring news of the outside world or tales of victory over the North Wind. He refuses to discuss his feud with Boreas, or why he chose such an isolated and besieged spot to make his stand, but it's a well-omened site: many travelers receive unexpected rescue when Auvindri appears out of nowhere to drive off the servants of cold. For the past year, the Boiling Tower has been under sporadic siege by Boreas's minions, and it is said that Auvindri may have learned the secret to stopping the relentless living glaciers, having driven one off by magic. Whether Auvindri might trade such knowledge for assistance in his current plight is unknown.

Aside from these places, the Bleak Expanse offers little in the way of geographical certainty or permanence. Sheets of ice the size of nations break up and grind against one another, in some places revealing churning waters a mile below and blasted, rocky terrain in others. None but the enigmatic skraelings and those in thrall to Boreas traverse these treacherous leagues with any confidence, and neither part with the land's secrets easily.

The Bleak Expanse

Symbol: White pick of Boreas on a black cloud

Ruler: Boreas the Devourer, the North Wind (god)

Important Personages: Auvindri Against-the-Wind (LE male fire giant); Queen Morrinn of Grokeheim, the Snow Queen, Daughter of Boreas (CE female legendary human)

Population: 9,950 (7,000 frost giants, 2,800 humans, 150 fire giants [Boiling Tower])

Capital: Geskleithron, population 2,400 giants, 1,000 humans

Great Gods: Boreas (patron), Chernobog, Loki, Vardesain, White Goddess

Trade Goods: Cold magic items, thralls, souls; fire and frost giant weapons, armor, tools, crafts

Adventures in the Bleak Expanse

Adventures in the tundra of the Bleak Expanse revolve around simple survival and the struggles against the mad godling Boreas.

- A group of skraelings begs the PCs for help. Some of their foolhardy youth found an entrance to an old castle complex under the glacial ice, and apparently have been taken prisoner by the derro that claim the tunnels as their own. Can the party save the younglings before there are eaten or driven mad?
- A Sikkimese merchant hires the PCs to negotiate with Auvindri for a powerful magical item in his possession. If they reach the Boiling Tower alive, they learn his price: steal a magical ice-crystal rod from Geskleithron.
- The PCs travel to Geskleithron to attempt to purchase bottled storms for use against a reaving armada of vættir dwarves. The vættir have risen from the Drownstone Road at the bottom of the Nieder Straits and are sacking the entire length of the Reaver Coast, leaving no survivors wherever they come ashore.
- A skraeling shaman came to a trading post with a foreboding tale, telling all who would listen of a great ship that rose from an enormous crack in the ice and sailed across it, bearing east at great speed. Its hull was made from fingernails, its braces of enormous ribs, its lines of woven hair, here and there still attached to withered faces flapping in the wind like rags. A ravening wolf's head prow at the fore dripped spittle that burned through the ice like lava, and a serpent's head prow at the stern twisted its neck back and forth as if wary of pursuit. The air was filled with the cracking of the ice and a mind-numbing droning, as though some gigantic hive were stirring. Could this be Naglfar, the ship of Loki and a herald of Ragnarok, making its way across the Bleak Expanse to its master's isle? If so, what manner of creatures pull at the oars? A great many sages and sovereigns would pay handsomely to know!

HULDRAMOSE

Symbol: The Tree of Thorn

Ruler: Thorgerd (NG female elfmarked druid 15) and Dark Irpa (NE female elfmarked sorcerer 18)

Important Personages: Ospak the Swamp Goat (N male human); Ingufrid the Deer (N female elfmarked); Vanggar Shadowbiter (N male trollkin)

Population: 34,300 (24,300 trollkin, 3,800 humans, 3,000 elfmarked, 400 gnomes, 1,200 trylleri, 200 shadow fey)

Capital: Huldramose, population 5,500 (3,800 trollkin, 1,000 humans, 700 elfmarked, 50 shadow fey)

Great Gods: Sif (patron), Freyr and Freyja, Baldur (Lada), Sarastra, Wotan

Trade Goods: Fish, honey, mead, mussels, reeds, poisons, mercenaries (trollkin)

The monstrous, destructive living glaciers of Boreas now move with swift purpose. Three make their way west toward the Lung of the Sea, and several others move south to further breach the Falling Wall.

Haamu Hills

The northwestern territories have a rough, hilly border that leads down into Thursrike, the land of the trollkin, ogres, and hill giants. The settlement of Crokeheim is a center for frost giants and sometimes counted as western tunheim, and Tuskgard is a fortified town for raiders, ung trollkin, and human bandits and outlaws. Both are dependent jarldoms, without ties of obedience to either ursrike or Jotunheim.

ROKEHEIM

ng Haakon Drakechoker, a frost giant famed among s kind, rules the nearby mountains from Crokeheim's lls of ice. The fearsome reputation of Crokeheim's ants, known for feasting on the remains of other giants any kind they encounter, keeps their home range free competition. They spurn diplomatic contact of any nd except the most servile, and then as well unless companied by extravagant and regular tribute. The ants of Crokeheim enjoy nothing more than devouring ing opponents, and they will travel great distances just descend on a small fishing village, delighting in striking ar in the hearts of survivors far from home and then pping back into the mountains.

USKGARD

is riverside fortress houses a warlike population of llkin and goblins dedicated to Boreas. Led by Ulf icknose (CN male trollkin barbarian 14), Tuskgard asts several skilled shipwrights, making the ships that il from it a source of terror for coastal settlements. From re, the trollkin warriors sail south to raid, bringing under and thralls from southern shores. Captives begin unishing journey inland, to be bartered as thralls, food, sacrifices to giants or worse.

ULDRAMOSE

Located in a lowland between two wide rivers that frequently flood, the swampy and soggy land of Huldramose is ruled not by a king, but by two elfmarked queens. Here the old ways of the Vanir remain strong and fey are common. The people live in a bountiful but treacherous marshland: punts and rowboats replace roads and horses.

Few dwarves travel to Huldramose, since the infamies of their wars are well remembered. Huldramose is named for the Huldra, fierce trollkin who think nothing of beating rrogant male warriors unconscious with their bare hands. heir valor is vouchsafed by Wotan One-Eye himself, for e gathered the first valkyries from among the Huldra, nd they still train mortal girls and women in the fighting rts. Those who doubt the fighting prowess of a band of hield maidens no longer do so after meeting the Huldra in battle.

The central town of Huldramose is built on thick stilts like a collision of giant wooden spiders. Witches and fey sorceresses are far more common than wizards or priests here. Snake-handling is a common ritual, combined with hallucinogenic potions brewed from swamp-serpent venom and narcotic herbs.

The queens of Huldramose are Thorgerd and Dark Irpa, elfmarked sorceresses claiming descent from the vanished

Adventures in Huldramose

Adventures in Huldramose center on the oracles and the worship of the fey powers.

- The PCs seek a powerful divination from one of the Huldra oracles before confronting a major villain.
- The Cult of Ragnarok has learned of the World Tree sapling, and they intend to steal or corrupt it. PCs must root out the spies in the court before the sapling comes to harm.

nobility of Thorn. Each rules in turn—one at home while the other travels in search of adventure. Neither queen has a husband, although each take heroes as lovers from time to time, and both have born strong daughters to carry on the family line.

The queens of Huldramose conceal the presence of a World Tree sapling, the Two Queens' Tree, said to be cut from the World Tree the dwarves once attacked in Thorn. Few know of the tree outside the royal household, but its growth is swift—soon it will be too tall to keep the secret of its existence.

JOMSBORG

The windswept Isle of Berserkers bears the brunt of lethal arctic winds blowing eastward from the Uttermost Sea. Only the toughest humans dwell here, and that's the way they like it. Everything on this island is dedicated to a single cause: glorious war. Jomsborg is home to the Jomsvikings, a force of raiders and mercenaries renowned for their savagery. Berserkers all, they're staunch warriors with a reputation as the fiercest of the fierce. When not out fighting, they train constantly in an austere and punishing regime designed to harden their bodies and perfect their fighting rages. They fight for any lord able to afford their substantial fees, roving far when the pay is right, and also venture out as raiders demanding battle or tribute.

Despised across the Reaver Coast, these mercenaries nonetheless abide by a strict code of honor and conduct. The Jomsvikings accept only humans into their ranks, warriors of proven valor who can endure great tests of strength and endurance—including a ritual duel with an existing Jomsviking. They are bound to defend each other in battle, forbidden to quarrel or speak ill of their fellows (irreconcilable differences are resolved by holmganga), and never flee battle or show any fear of hardship.

Of late, the Jomsvikings fear the possible upset of their age-old ways since trollkin warriors came to the isle to claim a place among the mercenaries' ranks. The Jomsvikings have fought the trollkin and their bestial sires in great numbers for many years so the notion is not a popular one, but few can deny the mettle of these warriors. Indeed, one trollkin called Solveig Rockhurler has sent word that she wishes to challenge Beoric Thorson, leaving the Jomsvikings in turmoil as they engage in heated debate over whether a trollkin berserker should be entertained at all. One thing is certain: to gain acceptance into the Jomsviking's ranks, the trollkin would have to forsake any allegiance to the giants.

JOMSBORG, ISLE OF BERSERKERS

SYMBOL: Thor's hammer on a red field

RULER: Beoric Thorson (CN male human barbarian 18)

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: Kjallak Bludsen (CN male human); Hafnir the Otter, Captain of the Ottar Felag (NE male human)

POPULATION: 3,800 (2,900 humans, 600 dwarves, 300 trollkin)

CAPITAL: Jomsborg, population 1,500 (900 humans, 500 dwarves, 100 trollkin)

GREAT GODS: Thor (patron), Volund, Tyr (Horus), Forseti (the Hunter), Hod (Charun)

TRADE GOODS: Mercenaries, weapons, armor

JOTUNHEIM

In Jotunheim, you can taste magic in the air and feel its tingle in your bones. It's a land of towering mountains, treacherous glaciers, scalding geysers, and magical hot springs, where the Northern lights can be clearly seen from every summit. The mightiest of giant kind rule its halls, and even gods walk cautiously in this domain. The giants have claimed Jotunheim as their home since the beginning of the world. They call it the Bones of Aurgelmir after their slain progenitor, and here they plot to regain their former status as masters of the world.

The Jotun lords despair at how small and puny other giants have become—a dwindling of size and power they ascribe to the rise of the Aesir and the plots of Wotan. Some Jotuns work tirelessly to return their people to their former glory, while others brood and look only to their own power and comfort. Millennia have passed since the Jotun

ADVENTURES IN JOMSBORG

Adventures in Jomsborg involve hiring mercenaries, fighting duels, or seeking a specific berserker.

- Your felag seeks Jomsborg mercenaries, but must prove you are worthy through combat.
- The PCs accompany a young jarl who wants to find the berserker who killed his father in a raid.
- The PCs search for a berserker who has a rare weapon or artifact that can be used in the fight against Boreas.

JOTUNHEIM, LAND OF GIANTS

Symbol: Skull of Aurgelmir

Ruler: Various Jotun, frost giant, and fire giant jarldoms

Population: 35,800 (13,800 Jotuns, 7,900 thursir, 4,700 frost giants, 3,300 fire giants, 2,950 humans, 1,750 dwarves, 1,400 trolls)

Capital: Sengajordensblod, population 12,600 (5,300 Jotuns, 2,500 thursir, 2,300 humans, 1,100 dwarves, 700 frost giants, 500 trolls, 200 fire giants)

Towns: Gastropnir, Gifrvagga, Griotunagardar, Thrymheim, Ut-Gard

Great Gods: Loki (patron), Jormungandr (Veles), Aegir (Seggotan), Hel (Vardesain), Mara (Marena), and sometimes Skadi (Sif)

Trade Goods: Gems, gold, thralls, exotic (giant) beasts

lords were unified. Other breeds of giant are scattered throughout the mountains and live much as their human neighbors do—farming and herding in the Thursrike, raiding down to the dwarven and human settlements, and bending their knees only to whoever can make them.

After the Jotuns, fire and frost giants are the most powerful inhabitants, rivals bound by mutual hatred. The frost jarls claim the northeast of Jotunheim and some of e Bleak Expanse beyond, while the fire lords make their me in a range of volcanoes called the Blodejord ("Crib Earth's Blood," in the Jotun tongue), rising around e charred and desolate remains of what once was a nningly fertile valley. Fire and ash erupt into the air, d any who die covered by the Crib's enchanted ashes rise ain as twisted undead.

Somewhere in the crags and mountains of Jotunheim, e Cult of Ragnarok makes its home, hatching plots to ing about the signs and omens that herald cataclysm. aving bought their way in with a combination of asure and a collection of flattering lies, the cultists ve convinced Utgard-Loki, an enormous Jotun giant of nsiderable fame, of the coming of Ragnarok. In turn, gard-Loki exerted his influence—and in some cases, s club—to grant the cultists a refuge here, where only e foolhardy would dare to trespass. However, the cult is t entirely safe. Not every Jotun is convinced by the cult; hers simply do not care but hate the idea of outlanders aking a home in their lands. Still others are not all at eager for Ragnarok to arrive. Therefore, the cultists rely travel far within Jotunheim, and never without a rmidable escort. To further secure their presence in e region, they have begun forging Surtalogi, the great apon of Ragnarok.

To the south of Jotunheim sits the remains of the reaver arf kingdom. It's home to exiled giant, ogres, and trolls, well as reckless dwarven and human adventurers out to ake their name by reclaiming a fallen citadel. The western ge is warmest, although too close to the fire giant artland for even the most foolhardy treasure hunter.

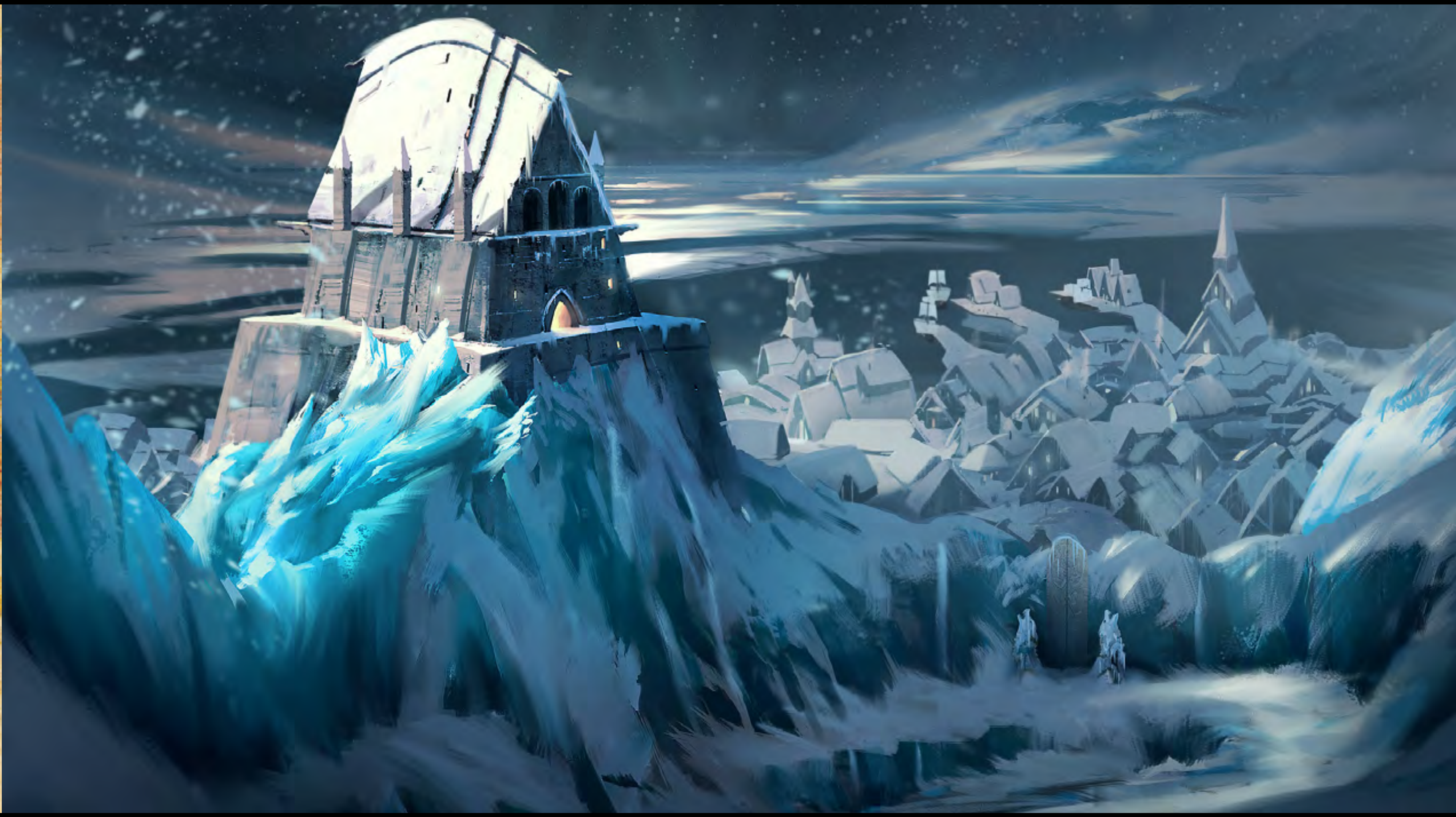
NSAROTH

cient beyond memory, no known mention of this ruin ists in written history. Though the ruin is now largely concealed by rough buildings of wood and stone, the winds of long ages wore away the original structures on the surface. Only a stone floor and 6 feet or so of a thick circular defensive wall on the southern side of the site remain. Holes and passages, however, lead to winding subterranean halls and rooms whose purposes have long been lost to time. As one descends through the chambers, galleries, and passages, the rooms begin to taper toward a single, spiraling stairway, cut into the inside of an

ADVENTURES IN JOTUNHEIM

Adventures in Jotunheim involve struggles to defeat or aid the giant tribes.

- Fire giant necromancers of Sengajordensblod are using the Crib-ash to raise an undead horde and to forge Surtalogi, the great weapon of Ragnarok. The adventurers are asked to instill minor amount of weak frost-iron into the weapon, to make it more likely to shatter in its crafting.
- The frost giants besiege the Boiling Tower. Will the PCs take sides?
- The PCs are hired to turn the giants against the Cult of Ragnarok by infiltrating the cult.



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feet before breaking off, but the shaft continues to descend, at least as far as a dropped torch can illuminate.

Only the worst weather drives those in the buildings above inside for shelter. The trolls, trollkin, bugbears, and fraughashar who occupy the buildings consider the ruin cursed and haunted, but they remain nonetheless in service to Boreas, whose agents sent them here.

The occupants barricaded all the known entrances to the ruin below, but one portal sees occasional use when a serious transgression occurs. The guilty party or parties are forced through the portal, which is then sealed behind them. They are slain on sight should they emerge within sight of Ansaroth before five nights have passed, but if they reappear any time after that they are allowed to rejoin their fellows. Thus far, this has yet to occur.

Tempers flare easily within the ancient chambers, and those within sometimes fly into a killing rage for little or no reason. Every manner of frightening sight or sound has been reported at one time or another, but groups of warriors as large as a dozen have gone missing entirely.

This small island earns renown as a sanctuary for many reasons. Its hot springs are famous for their restorative properties, and its people are known for their relatively peaceful (Northlanders would say, downright cowardly) ways. It's also famous for its skaldic schools, each run by a master bard who insists their style is greater than any other.

What the scholars here don't know isn't worth knowing—or so say the scholars. Skaldholm's kingship is decided by a contest of singing, tale-telling, and flyting (a contest-exchange of insults) every nine years. The king of the island, known as the Master of Thyles, leads a people striving to be regarded as more civilized than the hairy barbarians around them. He sits at the heart of a network of spies and informants, and little escapes the notice of his traveling skalds. Few Northlanders dare to vex this king openly, since his skalds can destroy reputations with a few choice words or songs in feasthalls across the North.

Word of the possibility of the coming of Ragnarok reached Skaldholm with lightning speed, carried by those who wanted to hear the scholars' reactions. The Master

owledge, and now the Master can't remember it. All the
alds now puzzle over the Riddle of the Forgotten Thing
no avail. The Master sends his best explorer Naglfar
eking wisdom over the sea, and his finest ley-line-
inner Randulfr out on the Raven's Road and elsewhere
eking the lost memory in the Shadow Realm. Sylvoll, his
rald and longtime confidant, pursues inquiries among
e priests and may someday untangle the thread.

TANNASGARD

annasgard is the most open and cosmopolitan of the
varven reaver kingdoms, a major trading enclave and a
teway to the Nieder Straits. For many merchants, it's
e farthest into Northern territory they care to venture.
ines are the backbone of Stannasgard's prosperity, since
e land is rich in veins of iron and adamant. Working
om these superlative raw materials, the dwarves of
annasgard have forged a reputation as master artisans,
pecially in the crafting of shields and armor.

Stannasgard is the friendliest of the three great dwarf
lls of the North. Just across the straits from the ruins of
iorn, it is home to great temples of Wotan, Thor, Volund,
d many shrines to Grajava the Shield Maiden. Its

SKALDHOLM

Symbol: Golden lyre

Ruler: The Master of Thyles (CN male human bard 14/sorcerer 4)

Important Personages: Sylvoll, Herald of Skaldholm (CG female dwarf), Naglfar the Sailor Skald (CG male human), Randulfr the Shield-Wolf and Stonespeaker (CN male human)

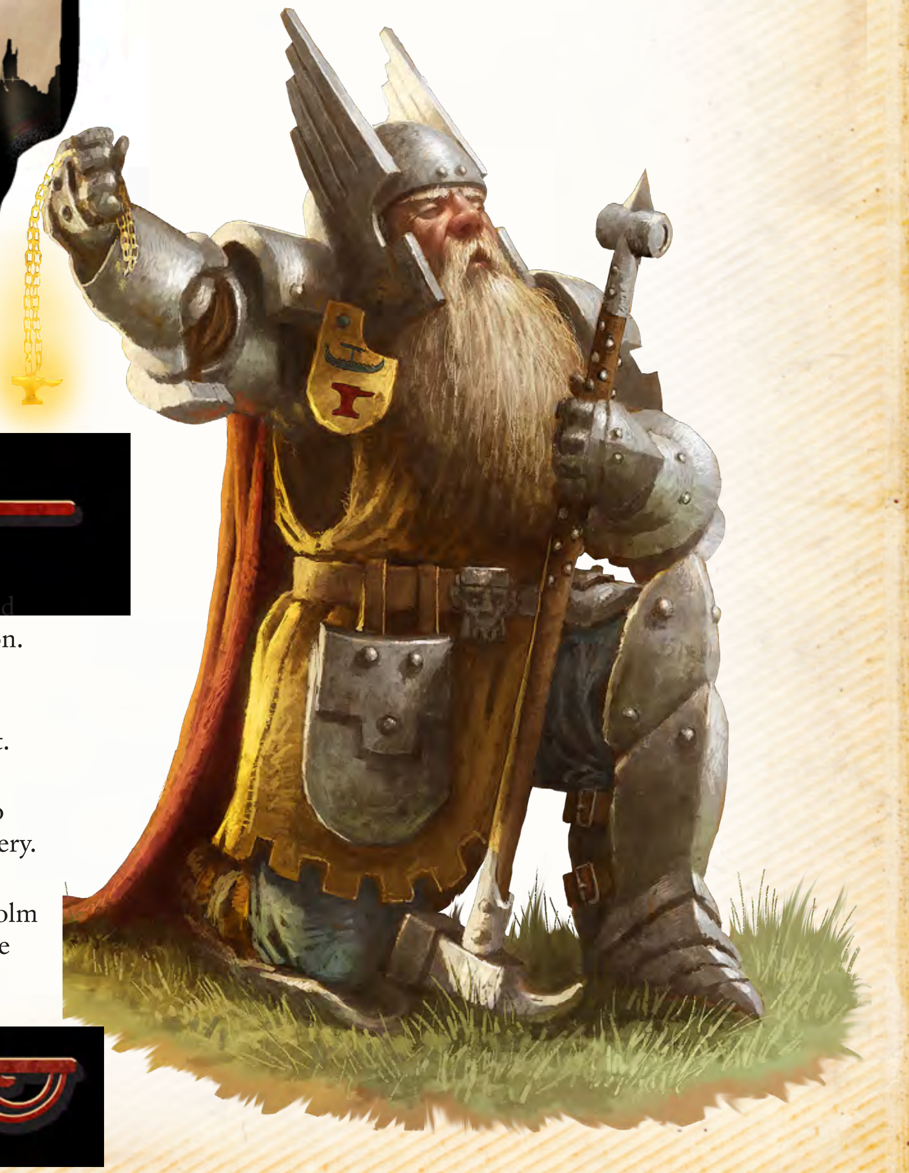
Population: 7,800 (3,800 humans, 2,950 dwarves, 650 elfmarked, 400 gnomes)

Capital: Skaldholm, population 4,200 (2,600 human, 1,200 dwarves, 300 elfmarked, 100 gnomes)

Great Gods: Baldur (Lada), Kvasir (Loki), Wotan, Sif, Tyr (Horus)

Trade Goods: Fish, mussels, skalds, ships, paper, music and lorebooks, silver amulets

of Thyles might have been able to shed some light on the matter, but he was tricked by Loki long ago into exchanging a secret for a piece of knowledge that the Master would one day discover: Ragnarok is not upon Midgard! When the Master discovered the truth, Loki claimed that



ADVENTURES IN SKALDHOLM

Adventurers in Skaldholm involve seeking skalds and bardic knowledge or attempts to redeem a reputation.

- The PCs are seeking a powerful artifact to use in their battle against Boreas and hope the bards of Skaldholm will have some clue to where to find it.
- One of the characters has been unfairly labeled a coward and oath-breaker. The PCs hire a skald to compose a new saga praising the character's bravery.
- Skaldholm bards sing a terrible, scurrilous song about the characters. They must travel to Skaldholm to find the source and put a stop to it. Perhaps the song is part of a plot to distract the party from a greater danger.

priesthood is immense, and much of its wealth is derived from crafting holy items infused with the power of the gods. Many consider the shields and armor of Stannasgard among the finest forged anywhere, and lordlings from the south often ask its paladins and defenders for aid. The dwarves of Stannasgard rarely ride to war, but when they do, their cause has never failed. Most recently, thousands of them traveled to the Wolfmark, ready to strike down the vampires and darakhul in Krakovar and Morgau.

Pilgrims come here from as far away as Zobeck and the Seven Cities, dragging sanctified anvils as a sign of devotion, to ask for a blessing at the nearby Shrine of a Thousand Anvils dedicated to Volund the Smith. On the summit of a crag-ridden mountain, this cavernous temple is littered with tools, weapons, and armor brought by supplicants.

Stannasgard was also a major shipbuilding center, with fine keels, prows, and sails all made here for sale to anyone along the straits, until this past year brought all work to a halt. A red dragon thought slain long ago, Visandred the Horse-Eater, dropped from the sky without warning, burning every stick of wood along the docks and shipyards he could find and then rending and tearing down whatever he could not burn. After making a meal of several dockworkers and the horses he prefers, Visandred flew away and hasn't been seen since. The destruction he left in his wake might take years to repair. What's worse, the majority of ships burned to the waterline were already bought and paid for by a wide assortment of foreign sovereigns, leaving Stannasgard's coffers, as well as its reputation, in a precarious state.

Nonetheless, what money can be spared keeps the forges of Stannasgard ringing with the sound of smiths' hammers both day and night, due to the recent spread (some might say "invasion") of the trollkin into the territory. New longhouses and farmsteads spread down the coast as these troubling new arrivals come in longships from the southern shores of Jotunheim.

STANNASGARD

Symbol: Anvil of Volund and Longship of Njord

Ruler: Beragorn Shipkeeper (LN male dwarf fighter 18)

Important Personages: Many-Bearded Ingifast Hollyshield (NG male dwarf), Blaðnir the Silver Leaf (NG female dwarf)

Population: 71,400 (42,000 dwarves, 17,000 humans, 7,500 trollkin, 2,900 gnomes)

Capital: Stannasgard, population 23,000 (19,000 dwarves, 3,000 humans, 500 trollkin)

Great Gods: Volund (patron), Baldur (Lada), Thor, Tyr (Horus), Wotan

Trade Goods: Gems, gold, iron, adamant, rare minerals, ambergris, fish, blubber, armor, shields, dwarven relics

Tanserhall

Tanserhall is the most ancient and sacred of all dwarven cities, beloved of Volund and Thor. Far below its sacred hearths and shrines is their holy of holies: the rune-etched Cradle Cave where the patron gods breathed life into the first dwarven people. Here Volund showed them gleaming

Adventures in Stannasgard

Adventures around Stannasgard involve the delicate balance between the "civilized south" and the "reaving north."

- A trollkin horde is climbing the mountain to sack the Shrine of a Thousand Anvils and steal the masterwork armor, shields, and weapons kept there. Can the PCs prevent the attack?
- A young ice linnorm has taken over one of the mining complexes and killed all the dwarven miners; can the party kill the beast and take its heart? Or will they become its next two-legged meals?
- The PCs have a powerful, sundered magical weapon or piece of armor. They must find a master armorer to reforge the item before their next battle.
- The PCs are hired to scout several trollkin settlements and ascertain their intent, through diplomacy or subterfuge. If the creatures have come to make war, they must be stopped!
- Stannasgard finds itself in dire straits, and wishes to hire the PCs to track down the lair of Visandred the Horse-Eater.

[redacted]

TANSERHALL

Symbol: Hammer of Thor and Anvil of Volund

Ruler: The Keeper of the First Citadel (LG male dwarf paladin 7 [Volund])

Important Personages: Keeper of the Cradle, Bjorg of Ten Thousand Runes (LG male dwarf); Keeper of Courage, Otta Klarasdottir (LG female dwarf); Ingjaldr the Amulet-Wright (LN male dwarf); Ingunn the Sweet (LN male ravenfolk)

Population: 19,350 (13,800 dwarves, 2,950 humans, 1,400 gnomes, 1,200 huginn [ravenfolk])

Capital: Tanserhall, population 8,600 (all dwarves)

Towns: Rook's Cove, Veles's Fang

Great Gods: Volund (patron), Thor (patron), Wotan, Tyr (Horus), Forseti (the Hunter)

Trade Goods: Gems, gold, adamant, stonework, woodwork, statuary, grains, thralls, mercenaries

[redacted]

ings are yours, from now until the end of time."

The dwarf clans of Tanserhall are pious and reclusive. e few who choose to travel (and fewer still that speak home) describe it as an awe-inspiring complex, more a assive underground cathedral than a city. The dwarves orship Volund and Thor with strict parity, to avoid ovoking their anger again, and they listen closely to the se counsel of Wotan. They keep their birthplace pure by rring other races from most of the halls entirely. Even e cantonal dwarves must undergo ritual purification and nctification before they can walk within, and for other ces the labyrinth of bureaucracy, custom, and outright varven obstinacy make it nearly impossible to gain entry.

To deal with those unwilling to use proper channels, the varves constructed a lethal maze of trapped corridors intercept unwelcome visitors. Transgressors are rarely en again. Rumor says only one in every hundred is ared, the rest transformed into stone statues that act both a warning and ward against further intruders.

nserhall once stood amid lofty peaks, but the land me crashing down from the blows of Thor's wrathful mmer and now the Most Hallowed Hall sits amid mere lls. Terrace farms dot the jagged slopes, worked by free varves overseeing a great many thralls of other races. rming these hardscrabble hills is hard work, but better an toiling in the dwarven mines.

From deep within the Cradle Cave, a strange and ghtening foe has emerged in the form of a horde of iernobog's spawn. These upright, ink-black hulking utes are crowned with elk horns. Many have engaged em in combat, but the creatures' terrible jaws deliver an fection that can turn the inflicted into another of the easts. Why they have come now and what they want has not yet been discovered, but their aim is clearly hostile.

Rook's Cove: A trollkin and human settlement ruled by Hengist Staffbreaker (male trollkin barbarian 14) on the frigid shores of the Nieder Straits, Rook's Cove serves as a port of call for pirates and outlaws who stalk the waves of the Northlands. The scarce trade in the Nieder Straits makes for few targets, especially when compared with southern seas, and those in reach are rich but well defended. Between the icy waters, bad weather, and the promise of capable resistance, one can understand the kind of people one finds in the Cove: desperate, fearless, violent, and capable. Due to longstanding rumors of the impending arrival of Wolfheim ships coming to take everyone for slaves, dwarves are treated with anything from wariness to immediate attack in Rook's Cove.

Veles's Fang: Veles's Fang, named for the smooth spit of rock jutting from its bay, defines the inland terminus of a trade network stretching along a network of rivers, lakes, swamps, and streams from here to Vidim and points south, and north to Björnrike and beyond. Shallow-bottomed longboats plying this aquatic labyrinth trade with Khazzaki tribes, wandering Kariv, and anyone or

ADVENTURES IN TANSERHALL

[redacted] environment and dealing with the giant inhabitants.

- The dwarven wizards of the citadel have found a way to raise mountains to their former glory with an epic ritual. The PCs are hired to retrieve rare materials for the ritual from the distant deserts of Nuria Natal.
- Something is crawling out of the lower depths and toward the Cradle Cave. The dwarves seem powerless to stop it and are desperate enough to allow outsiders into their holy ground.
- The PCs are hired to ransom or otherwise retrieve a rogue caught trying to sneak into the citadel. The rogue is now a statue on prominent display in the Keeper's audience chambers.
- Holy places associated with Balder in the area have been targets of abuse, adding weight to the worry [redacted]

anything else willing to strike a fair bargain. Herleifr Sharp-Tongue (NG male huginn rogue 11) oversees a mixed village of huginn, trollkin, and bearfolk.

THUNDER MOUNTAIN

North of Stannasgard on the Trollbane Coast lies a peculiar hall. Once lost to an infestation of stone trolls and their allies, Thunder Mountain has fully recovered under the rule of Alaric, who styles himself the Mithral Dwarf. Alaric is the leader of an adventuring company—the Band of the Thunder Hammer—that took up cause of freeing Thunder Mountain, and then settled in to rule the rich mithral mines. Alaric's adventuring companions convinced him to open the mountain to other races beyond the dwarves, and both the small winterfolk and the huginn took him up on the offer.

Thunder Mountain has seen over 150 years of peace, enough time to delve deep, attract new races to the region, and to build a great temple, the Shrine of Golden Hammers to mighty Thor. The conservative dwarves of Stannasgard, Tanserhall, and Wolfheim consider the inclusion of humans and halflings as equals in Thunder Mountain mildly indecent, but so far no one has had the courage to raid the place.

Thunder Mountain thrives due to its willingness to work with other races, and because it has no tolerance for raiders and reavers. Its smiths, miners, and scholars work hard under the eye of Thor's clerics, and its founders are powerful enough that even giants quail at the mention of this hall. It is in some ways distinctly un-dwarven, but no one can argue with its success.

Thunder Mountain serves as the headquarters of the Order of the Thunderer, a militant dwarven order of priests and followers of Thor. The commandery here includes priests, paladins, and fighters sworn to destroy giants, trolls, and ogres who otherwise plague the region, and many of their missions involve giant slaying. Most recently, the order directs its energies toward opposing the machinations of the Cult of Ragnarok, as one of the few organizations with a thorough understanding of the cult's aims and activities thanks to the skill of the order's spies. The Order of the Thunderer claims that it was founded in the presence of the god, and every new member of the order receives a silvered hammer as part of their initiation. It is actively recruiting at the moment, since one of its pillars, the archmage Delric, and its best scout, Timesh, were recently assassinated by agents of the cult. Visiting rogues and arcanists might be questioned as spies or potential allies.

REYKURBRAND VOLCANO

North of Thunder Mountain, a lone, steep-sided, eternally smoking volcano dominates the landscape for miles around. The warmed earth keeps the ground clear of ice nearby, and then in patches through local dells and valleys. Sinmara, the wife of Surtr and a powerful queen among the Jotun, rules the surrounding area from a fortress

THUNDER MOUNTAIN

SYMBOL: Red gauntlet holding a double hammer staff, white field

RULER: Alaric the Peace Bringer (LG male dwarf cleric 15 [Thor])

IMPORTANT PERSONAGES: Delglass MoonStar (LN male elf); Iosca Quickstride (CG female halfling); Remie Grayleaf (NG female elfmarked); Timesh Youngport (NG male human); Marshall Wulf Thorsen (CG male dwarf)

POPULATION: 31,600 (23,000 dwarves, 6,800 humans, 1,800 huginn, 1,400 halflings, 200 trollkin)

GREAT GODS: Thor (patron), Baldur (Lada), Freyr and Freyja, Sif, Wotan

TRADE GOODS: Beer, iron, silver, mithral, rare gemstones, clockwork

ADVENTURES IN THUNDER MOUNTAIN

Adventures in Thunder Mountain are tied to its ambitions and the maintenance of its peaceful reign.

- A ship of dwarves has returned from the West with tales of an island of shield maidens, a hall of glorious battle, a plane of spears and glory. Does anyone dare seek it out?
- A sleipnir has been sighted near the top of Thunder Mountain. The peak is deadly, but if it could be caught, the eight-legged horse would provide huge bragging rights for Alaric and his people.
- The stone trolls claimed the mithral mines of Thunder Mountain, with new and deadly giant allies. They must be destroyed before they collapse the main galleries of the mines.
- A cell of the Cult of Ragnarok is leading a force of giants through the mountain passes to raid Thunder Mountain.

THURSRIKE

Symbol: A shield with a red bend sinister

Ruler: Guthmundur Raggnarson (CN male Jotun)

Important Personages: Laughing Kettil (CN male Jotun); Ulli Wotanson, Jarl of the Thursir (NE male thursir giant); Ingemar Varblut, Jarl of the Hill Giants (NE male hill giant); Enevold Hraundrykkir, Jarl of the Ogres (CN male ogre); Glytta Weggesdottir, Priestess of Jormungandr (LN female stone giant); Kaprasíus Quickstep, High Priest of Loki (CE male trollkin)

Population: 35,000 (15,000 ogres, 10,000 trollkin, 7,000 thursir giants, 2,000 hill giants, plus 500 frost and 500 stone giants) with 12,000 human and dwarven slaves

Great Gods: Jormungandr (Veles), Boreas, Loki, Ninkash, White Goddess

Trade Goods: Wool, sheep, cattle, leather

of fire giants. Legend states that Reykurbrand guards a portal to Muspellheim submerged in lava. Surtr, the legendary Jotun warrior and foe of the Aesir, comes and goes from Reykurbrand in his travels, though his sword *Lævateinn* stays behind in a chest with Sinmara.

Queen Sinmara knows of the rumors of Ragnarok's imminent arrival, but she dismisses them. Citing her

ADVENTURES IN THURSRIKE

Adventures in Thursrike involve surviving the environment and dealing with the giant inhabitants.

- Kettil Buckbridge has sent a cart containing a powerful magical cargo crashing down into the gorge he lays across. A pair of thursir smiths offers great reward to anyone who will descend the gorge beneath the giant and fetch the treasure for him, or convince Kettil to move along. Either way, the giants warn the PCs that Kettil must not be allowed to see the treasure or he will be roused to great fury, though they won't say why.

sband's prominent role in the prophecies, she points t her continued possession of his sword—so central to at the Norns predict—and that ends the discussion as as she is concerned.

HURSRIKE

e land known as Thursrike holds some of the oldest uctures in the Northlands. Several fortresses occupied giants, ogres, and trollkin have stood in all their lopean glory as far back as the oldest legends, when at battles were waged between the giant occupants and gods. The lands surrounding these redoubts support t herds of livestock, from sheep to shaggy northern tle to aurochs. These herds support the giantish pulation from Thursrike to Jotunheim.

he wilder lands surrounding the cultivated pasturage grazing herds is wild and treacherous in the extreme, pulated by remorhazes, white dragons, thuellai, salfar, and warlike bands of yeti. It is said that the gods nt here, between pitched battles with the giants. Though ir base lies in Jotunheim, a large contingent of the Cult Ragnarok makes its home here among giant allies in the ient fortress named Birgkrona.

lvaträd was once an enormous tree, and the Vanir who rsaw its growth shaped it into a temple to forgotten ds. The hollow roots contain passages and winding irs which are said to open onto the shore of a vast bterranean sea. Portions of the wood still extend leaves h spring, though the whole tree is no longer a single ng thing.

Kupparsheim was old when giants first came to ursrike. This small, stone-walled fortress was long abandoned due the peculiarity of its location on a field of ice. However, a recent thaw revealed the picture to be incomplete. The fort is merely the top two levels of a much greater structure buried in the ice. The walls are covered in strange murals whose meanings remain to be puzzled out. The passages that can be seen from the surface do not appear to be clogged with ice, whetting the appetites of those who wish to dig down and potentially expand their tiny fort.

Kittelberg is a smoking volcano with an active caldera of slowly bubbling magma. Sacred to Loki and Hel, many sacrifices are made to the two gods here, and the area is tended by a husband and wife who serve as priests to the two gods.

Recently, a Jotun giant known as Laughing Kettil decided to lie down and rest across a river gorge, destroying the only bridge when he attempted to use it as a backscratcher. Unbothered by the chasm beneath his spine (and finding the sound of the plunging river quite restful), he hasn't gotten back up for months now. When a trader grew bold enough to ask how long he planned on staying, Kettil said that he might remain a good long time, but that he wouldn't care if people were to build ramps to get over his massive belly while he rested. This bizarre state of affairs worked for a month or two, but then Kettil grew

bored. He told travelers they could cross as before, but on one condition: they must tell him a funny joke first. The new arrangement is far worse than it sounds. Laughing Kettil doesn't laugh easily, and several half-pulverized piles of remains attest to his impatience for bad jokes. Then again, even if one does make him laugh, crossing the Jotun's expansive belly is hazardous in itself. Kettil may burst into laughter as one crosses, causing his gut to quake and rumble with a force that has thrown c
horses, and witty Northlanders. Kettil Bu
is now called) occasionally drops hints th
spot for some greater purpose, but his an
and evasive when asked about it directly.

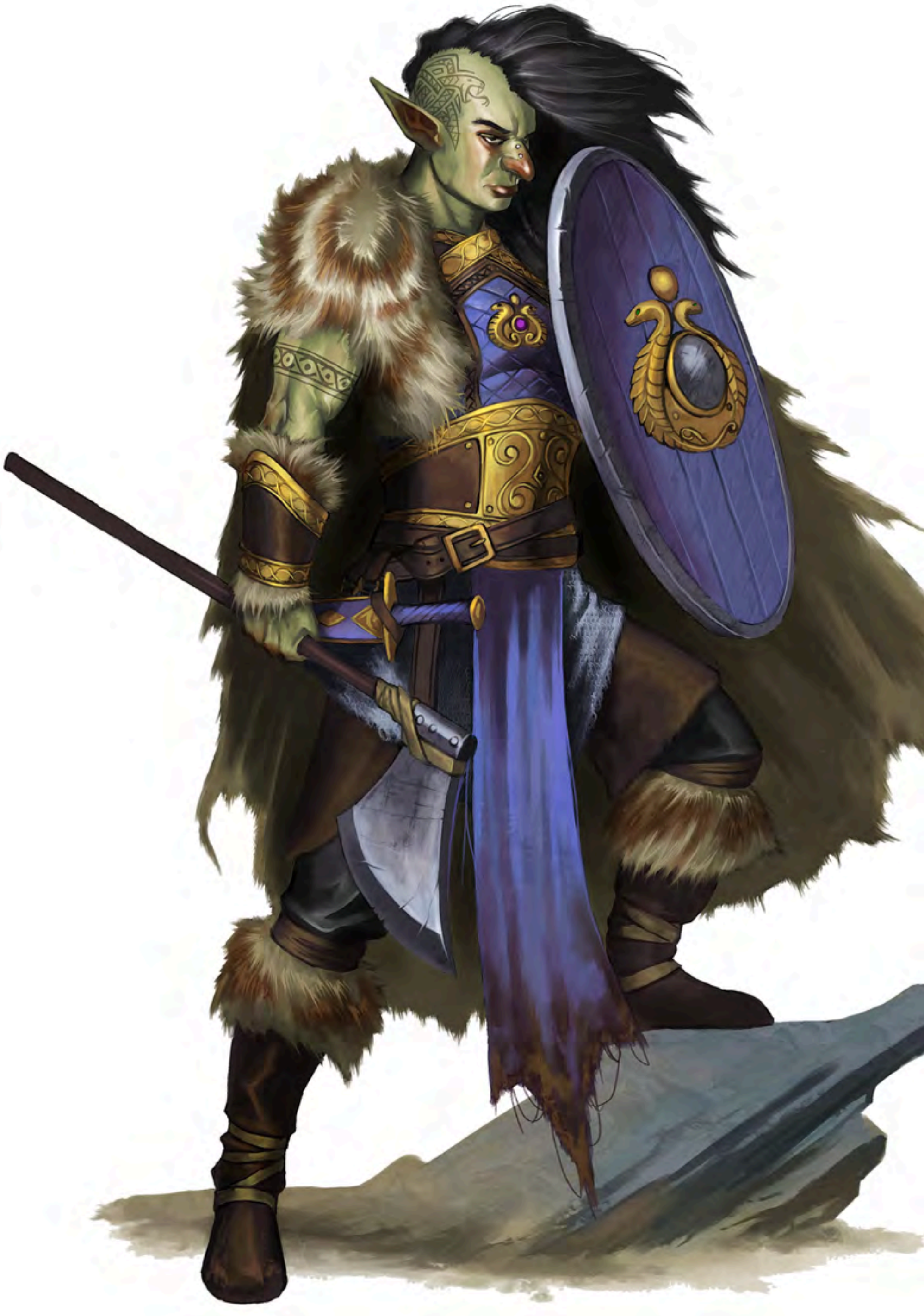
TROLLHEIM

South of the Reaching Mountains and ea
Jotunheim, a fertile forest teeming with
and fauna is sheltered from the worst exc
and wind. Trollheim's inhabitants are cu
fearless explorers, and fearsome raiders.
dwarf, or troll, few embrace the culture o
fiercely. They farm, brawl, raid each other
and consider themselves the best of all pe
Trollheim's humans live in sheltered fjor
claim mountain peaks and trolls, fey, and
in the forest's depths. Most inhabitants o
in independent farmsteads and villages t
in regional Þings when danger threatens
have little patience for talk of kings and k

Whether through some inherent
fecundity, favorable conditions, or the wi
of Freyr and Freya, the trollkin—creatur
once considered mere freaks of nature—
appear to breed true and in unheralded n
Indeed, scholars have difficulty framing a
doesn't involve the direct hand of a divine
population explosion. Regardless, as the
their reach, they encroach on the territor
isolated reaver dwarven clans, steadily pu
Trollheim. This development suits the dw
degree; the land is fertile, after all. Howe
claim the land the dwarves now occupy fi
a tough spot. The dwarves are a relentless
enemy when crossed, and yet notoriously
diplomatic overtures.

Should the trollkin drive refugees from
into Trollheim, the delicate balance of po
the various jarls in the region could weak
allowing the dwarves to run them out ent
to aged Uffi Toothless to take charge or s
younger, stronger jarl. Uffi, finally facing
to his reign, contemplates a shocking and
maneuver—elevating a trollkin jarl. This
legitimacy to a clan of trollkin, but it mig
and numerous ally against the potential t
dwarves the trollkin push into the region
Uffi fears from long experience. How thi
the politics of the region, or Uffi's reign, remains a source of heated debate in the longhouses.

Trade in the region suffers, and even the trolls who hawk their wares throughout Trollheim do so with a growing sense of trepidation. Some human jarls protest, claiming that an obscure poetic work describes the existence of a trollkin jarl as a Ragnarok prophecy. This has led many a human warrior to challenge trollkin they encounter to combat.



TROLLHEIM

Symbol: Njord's Trident between the twin trees of Freyr and Freyja

Ruler: Uffi Toothless (LE male human barbarian 16)

Important Personages: Veska Flamehair (NE female trollkin); Juri Jensson, Master of Ships (LN male dwarf)

Population: 132,000 (87,800 humans, 21,650 trollkin, 13,800 dwarves, 4,200 goblins, 3,300 ravenfolk, 900 gnomes, 350 trylleri)

Capital: Noatun, population 34,000 (22,500 humans, 2,900 dwarves, 8,000 trollkin, 600 gnomes)

Towns: Amberhall, Jarrgard, Varnerhall

Great Gods: Njord (patron, Seggotan), Hod (Charun), Wotan, Mara (Marena), Freyr and Freyja

Trade Goods: Fish, ambergris, reindeer, ships, mussels, gems, gold, iron, steel

ving the human population of western Trollheim
nost leaderless. The chaos left behind in the wake of so
any vanished jarls and warriors has ended many feuds
d created room for more trollkin and even scattered
ost goblin (fraugashar) tribes. Advice from wizened
eybeards can only do so much for those too young
d foolhardy to listen, and the unwritten laws of honor
d custom were flouted with enough frequency that
nerations-old alliances have fallen apart. Power-hungry
irs still seek lands and foes to prove themselves against,
d those with slimmer chances of inheritance look to
ke cultivated lands.

A World Tree called Wotan's Tree stands in Trollheim
ar the mouth of the Tearstain River, downriver from
e Fallen Kingdoms. The ravenfolk roost there often, on
eir way to various jarls or to consult with their seers and
omspeakers. It is one of the safest World Trees, since
ravenfolk make sure that only those ready to fly beyond
e mortal world enter its weaving branches and dappled
ht of many planes. Legends claim that Wotan learned
e runes here and the ravenfolk maintain a shrine in his
nor, though few humans visit this sacred grove.

OATUN

Trollheim has a capital it is Noatun, a great human
y of the North. It was founded by the god Njord when
was a mortal sorcerer of epic power and a sea captain
unmatchable skill. Back then the people revered the
ld sea god, Aegir. When Mara bedded him and their
st begat the disastrous flood that created the Swive,
e people called on Njord (Seggotan) to save them from
e rising waters. Njord's magic held back the sea for
ne times nine days, while dwarves and humans labored
gether to build the great sea wall that still protects their
rbor from wave and storm. For this they earned Aegir's
undying enmity, but the city was saved and prospered
under a new patron.

Adventures in Trollheim

Adventures in Trollheim are split between intrigue and magic in Noatun and bloody adventures in the hinterlands.

- The PCs must bring together a delicate alliance of Noatun humans, woodland fey, and mountain dwarves to resist a trollkin horde led by a powerful ice maiden sorceress, which threatens them all with extinction.
- At a feast thrown by King Uffi and attended by the PCs, dwarves, Khazzaki, Sikkimese, and centaurs, a powerful and respected jarl is poisoned. The PCs must find the killer among the many guests and clear their names at the same time.
- The PCs are invited to go on a Great Hunt for bear by a powerful jarl, but it turns out the bear that was killed was a hamingja (sacred animal) for a local tribe of trylleri. Now they must complete a dangerous quest to placate the Vanir spirits or risk a blood feud and a powerful fey curse.
- In western Trollheim, a band of landless young trollkin warriors have flocked to the banner of a charismatic outlaw with plans to challenge Uffi Toothless. Both Uffi and the upstart offer great reward for assistance in defeating their enemies.
- Bears and wolves grow wise enough to avoid traps, sometimes lying in wait for those who set them to return. This newfound caginess indicates the leadership of a greater intelligence at work, but who?

Rare for a human settlement, Noatun is built m
stone than wood thanks to the skill of local dwarf c
High thick walls guard against landward attack, wh
her trading docks and famous shipyards are surrou
by the enchanted sea wall, which magically calms b
wave and weather. The wall is surmounted by nine t
whose masters are charged with the wall's upkeep a
defense. It's a prestigious post; the rival Tower Lor
Noatun's elite and form the core of the king's court
current king is Uffi Toothless, a warlord of unseem
who is physically frail but as cunning as Loki and sk
in keeping one step ahead of power hungry jarls an
rival kings. Noatun is rich and cosmopolitan, welco
traders and visitors from far afield: longships laden
with plunder and thirsty raiders, Khazzaki and cen
caravans, Ironcrag airships, and occasional flying is
of cloud giants or magicians of distant Sikkim. Eve
with gold to spend are welcome (but watched close

Amberhall: A large coastal village with a lively tra
post, Amberhall thrives under the direction of a cap
named Gunhilda the Lefthanded (female human ra
13), though she swears fealty to Uffi Toothless in N
Her ships and sailors, known for their wily evasiven
when dodging pirates, have sailed as far as Barsella,
lately they focus their efforts on New Wolfheim, a ri
profitable proposition for non-dwarven traders.

Jarrgard: Atop a low hill on the shore of Black La
the squat, snow-covered Jarrgard is an isolated dwa
fort protecting a lucrative silver mine. Hentgolf Tro
(N male dwarf barbarian 16), formerly of Wolfheim an
a dwarf of fearsome reputation as a warrior, leads heavily laden longboats downriver when the ice thaws. The trip is a lively one. Salmon swarm upriver at this time, often chased by mated pairs of mahoru, who use Black Lake as a nursery before leading their young back downriver.

Jarrgard sees to its own needs and refuses trade with those settlements in no uncertain terms. Hengolf sent word to Noatun, informing Uffi Toothless that any approach made to his ships, the top half of the river, or Jarrgard will be considered an attack and dealt with mercilessly. Uffi made light of the message, pointing out the remoteness of Jarrgard and declaring in response that he would respect the dwarf's demands as long as Hengolf agreed not to set foot on the moon. Hengolf has not yet replied. Nevertheless, Jarrgard remains a remote and reputedly hostile destination.

Varnerhall: Perched on the steep cliff at the end of a heavily forested fjord, Vernerhall is a remote but prosperous village supporting high mountain farmholds. Clever use of the terrain and shrewd placement of defensive fortifications make Varnerhall surprisingly secure, considering the wild country which surrounds it.

Varnerhall makes a point of maintaining good relations with the nomadic people who pass through the region, trading for the furs, ivory, and reliable cold weather equipment and clothing. Jarl Yngvarr Ironsides (male human fighter 12) has granted the nomads and even a clan of goblins shelter within his fortifications and defended them when they have sought his aid in the past, and in return they provide valuable intelligence about anything from hostile creatures headed toward the hall to inclement weather on its way.

THE VARGRIKE

Symbol: Blue wolf's head on golden ermine

Ruler: Wargaz the Cruel (CE female nightgarm barbarian 18)

Important Personages: Hildigunn the Shield Maiden (CN female human); Folkmar the Howler (CE male human werewolf)

Population: 15,160 (3,900 winter wolves, 1,350 werewolves, 1,500 worgs, 4,400 trollkin, 1,200 trylleri, 800 humans, 650 dwarves, 400 gnomes, 310 nightgarms, 250 Sons of Fenris)

Capital: Moon Palace, population 3,600 (1,000 winter wolves, 200 werewolves, 700 trollkin, 400 humans, 600 worgs, 300 dwarves, 100 nightgarms, 50 Sons of Fenris, 50 gnomes)

Great Gods: Fenris-Hati (Vardesain), Boreas, Hod (Charun), Hel (Marena), Loki

Trade Goods: Lumber, venison, rabbit and deer furs

The Vargrike

Trollheim's most unwelcome neighbor is the Vargrike, a stretch of hilly taiga where the inhabitants worship Fenris in howling ceremonies and nonbelievers are relegated to thralldom. Here werewolves, worgs, winter wolves, and wolves make their home, and woe betide trespassers. The only law here is the law of tooth and fang, and other intelligent races are tolerated only as food or slaves. The "kindest" wolves treat their thralls as pets, but most treat them like cattle. The land remains largely unworked, since only thralls and sedentary werewolves need fields to farm.

One ruined city remains in the Kingdom of the Wolf, called the Moon Palace. Amid scattered blocks of moss-encrusted stone, Wargaz the Cruel, queen and high den mother of the wolf folk, rules from the remains of a palatial citadel. An ancient werewolf with gray-white fur, she's outlived scores of mates and rivals. Her personal guard of monstrous wolves is known as the Moon [redacted] wolf that chases the moon on its nightly course and is prophesied to one day catch and swallow it.

Few creatures escape fear altogether, and the same is true of the werewolves of the Vargrike. The wilderness surrounding the ancient elven ruins of what must have been an outpost of Thorn has seen a large influx of fey creatures. What's more, these creatures have taken to curing the werewolves they encounter of lycanthropy. Many see this as yet another sign of Ragnarok come to pass, citing the poetic verse "Wolf shall eat his brother's heart when it runs with the blood of Man." In truth, few of those cured by the fey live through the following days as old rivals take advantage of their weakened state. Even those who profess to love the cured often slay them out of pity or disgust.

WOLFHEIM

Wolfheim is an isolated dwarf hold guarding an uncompromising locale in wild country near Huldramose and Trollheim. Other races would consider settling there to be a suicidal mistake, but the dwarves of Wolfheim think of it as a worthy challenge.

Prideful, bold, and highly traditionalist, the dwarves of Wolfheim hold to the old reaving ways more fiercely than any other dwarven clan. The reavers of Wolfheim raid and [redacted] their wrath. They reave south across the Nieder Straits as well, to claim tribute or seize fresh thralls to work their mines and valley holdings.

Wolfheim lacks the farms that surround most dwarf holds. Slaves must hunt or tend vast reindeer herds to fill their masters' tables with meat, and they suffer greatly from winter wolf and worg attacks. Even worse, thralls are forbidden to kill wolves even in defense, thanks to an ancient pact between the dwarves and local winter worgs, who serve the dwarves as guards and scouts. The younger dwarves even breed these wolves to guard their great herds of reindeer and caribou.

The Wolfheim hall is famous for its wild winter revels, when enormous brewing barrels of ale are drained in a single night, with fire magic presented by the forge-priests and rune magic by the one-eyed priests of Wotan. The Wolfheim reavers are keen to take grain and hops as plunder or in trade.

Because of its hard land and refusal to tolerate the views of their moderate kin, Wolfheim has a well-earned reputation as the spiritual home for traditionalist reaver dwarves. It's a beacon for young dwarves who want to embrace the fearsome reaver culture, and elders who still dream of the bygone ages when dwarves were masters of the world. From the Reaver's Cave, they prepare their boats and make offerings for glorious conquest across the straits.

The recent founding of a new jarldom, the Wolfmark across the Nieder Straits, provides a new destination for those seeking the glory of the old ways. How better to prove one's valor than to wage war against a kingdom of the undead, while carving out a bigger and bigger piece of what was recently a rich human kingdom?

Back at home, the chaos in the surrounding regions offers opportunities to the reavers of Wolfheim, and some now consider leading their thralls to reoccupy and cultivate the lands south of the ruins of Nordheim, though steering clear of the ruins. If successful, the new grazing grounds would bring in trade with the Wolfmark. A small settlement has been established in anticipation of the endeavor finding approval, and so far there has been only one minor setback (see "Nordheim" below).

FALLEN KINGDOMS OF THE NORTH

At one time, the North was the home of culture and wisdom. It held the Rainbow Bridge, Bifrost, a road to the Godshall of Valhalla, the battleground of the Plane of Spears, the Storm Court of Perun, and other far-flung realms of great magic and strong warriors. Those gateways were first stolen by the elves and moved—some say Bifrost once opened on Valera or near it—and then shut entirely.

The greatness of the vast North remains because her people are stout and true—but many of her kings and cities are no more. The most famous are Aurvang, Issedon, and Nordheim.

ADVENTURES IN THE VARGRIKE

[redacted] rescue and survival.

- The werewolves plan a mass sacrifice to Fenris, intended to infect neighboring lands with a plague of lycanthropy. Can the PCs prevent the sacrifice—and get out alive?
- A spy among the Moon Hounds tells the PCs that Wargaz the Cruel has obtained the Horn of the Giants, a mighty artifact that will give Boreas great power and might hasten Ragnarok. The PCs must intercept the werewolves, ice maidens, and fraughashar carrying the Horn to Geskleithron and the Tower of the North Wind.
- The Moon Hounds have been raiding into nearby territories and wreaking havoc. To defeat them the PCs must travel into the heart of the kingdom with silver and steel in hand. What provokes them to raid? Can they be bought off—or slain?
- The priesthood of Freyr and Freya seek assistance to save one of their number, a recently cured werewolf long in thrall to Wargaz the Cruel but recently cured and in hiding, along with others in similar state.

Aurvang

On the shores of the Tearstain River stands the remains of Aurvang, once a dwarfhold of deep ring magic and a site of pilgrimage, for the eye of Wotan and the holy shield of the dwarf maiden Grajvar were both kept there. As a kingdom, Aurvang was famous for hard work, bitter strength of arms, and a ruthless streak in merchant dealings. Its last king, Regni Othinson, attempted to bargain with a fire dragon and was incinerated where he stood along with two brothers and a host of guardians for failing to budge from an offer that the dragon found insulting. Various fiery wyrmlings and linnorms still hunt reindeer, elk, and humans in the river valley; no settlement there has thrived since dwarven days, but their halls of treasure are still rumored to stand intact somewhere behind a stony door.

Issedon and the Fallen Vanguard Kingdoms

Long ago the dwarf citadels of Aurvang and Nordheim allied with the humans of Issedon, a stronghold populated by Trollheim warriors and powerful wizards from the legendary polar realm of Hyperborea. Known as the Vanguard Kingdoms, these three sites guarded the world from the rage of Boreas. The alliance's greatest creation was the Wall, a line of fortified bulwarks that sealed off the passes from the Bleak Expanse. For centuries, Boreas sent thuellai and ice elementals through the valleys, but thanks to the Wall—strengthened by Hyperborean magic and dwarven stonemasonry—the Vanguard Kingdoms held his worst excesses back.

Tired of defeat, Boreas unleashed a new weapon on the North: living glaciers. Unstoppable masses of ice larger than the small kingdoms, these rivers of living ice moved slowly but inexorably south from the Bleak Expanse, crushing everything in their path. They destroyed Aurvang and swallowed Issedon, sundering both the Wall and the alliance that defended it. Although collapsed in many places, the stones and sorcery of the Falling Wall (as it is now known) still hold against the onslaught of Boreas and his creatures, but every year the glaciers topple another section and allow Boreas's chilling power into the wider world.

The pass is not entirely undefended, however. The undead remnants of Issedon's defenders, ghosts and vættir, still stand in defiance of the North Wind. A cabal of liches commands the defenders in their eternal war, and they do not suffer interference or suggestions that their troops should move on to their rightful rest.

WOLFHEIM

Symbol: Anvil of Volund over a wolf's head

Ruler: Thulsamir Wolfbrother (LN male dwarf ranger 13)

Important Personages: Fraenir the Glutton (NE male dwarf); Bandit-Jarl Brökk and Bandit-Smith Eitri (CN male dwarves)

Population: 23,900 (17,700 dwarves, 1,700 humans, 4,500 trollkin, various packs of trolls, winter wolves and worgs)

Capital: Wolfheim, population 5,100 (4,000 dwarves, 600 trollkin, 500 humans)

Great Gods: Thor, Volund (patron), Wotan, Hod (Charun), the Hunter

Trade Goods: Gems, gold, thralls, reindeer, iron

Adventures in Wolfheim

Adventures in Wolfheim involve the reaver dwarves' constant battle against the Jotuns and trollkin.

- A dwarven member of the party is invited to join a Wolfheim felag and plunder along the Reaver Coast.
- Something is killing whole herds of reindeer and the thrall herders. The wolves cannot track it. Can the PCs find it and kill it before it wipes out Wolfheim's herds?
- The spawn of Chernobog lead giants and other fell creatures out of Jotunheim and turn thrall's farmholds into bloody nightmares, leaving grisly tableaus in their wake as they make their way toward the capital.
- The PCs discover Wolfheim is planning a major raid against Stannasgard. Will the party warn the unsuspecting dwarves of Stannasgard, or join in the mayhem and plunder?
- A pair of mahoru have moved upstream from the Strait and into the lake the thralls use for fishing and drinking water, reducing the fish stocks and making life a constant hazard for fisherfolk. A nearby jarl is offering a rich reward to anyone who can bring him their pelts.

Thuellai and ice golems prowl the glacial plain over Issedon, but many of the city's dwarven-crafted halls still stand beneath half a mile of blue ice. Broken crenellations of once-mighty towers stretch toward the surface. Some provide access to adventurers armed with ice-breaching spells or foolhardy enough to brave remorhaz tunnels.

Trapped within the city centuries ago, some of Issedon's dwarf and human residents survived its demise. Entombed, the survivors turned to cannibalism and inbreeding, and the results now scrabble through Issedon's chill tunnels as ghoulish derro. They scavenge the sunken city in an instinctual search for treasures, though they hardly know their value. Every Issedon lair is filled with the derro's junk and salvaged artifacts, which they constantly steal from each other. Only the promise of fresh meat distracts them from the lure of Issedon's ancient relics.

An Issedonian tower completely buried in glacial ice has been exposed along the shore of Trollheim. What lies within the frozen ruin and which of the young jarls might make use of it remains to be seen.

NORDHEIM

The greatest of the reaver kingdoms was the first to fall, the shame compounded by the dwarves not knowing exactly how it came to pass. Not from siege, they say with a fierce certainty. During a terrible winter in which the overland routes to Nordheim were blocked, something crept up from the depths of the earth to extinguish its hearths and forge fires, destroying the dwarven capital from within. Dwarves variously blame frost giants and their Jotun masters, Boreas and his freezing winds, fey conspiracies and elven ghosts, and even alien demons from the far side of the endless void of Ginnungagap. Whatever the truth, Nordheim was beaten first, and far worse, than any other fallen hall.

Of the many potential causes of the fall of Nordheim bandied about, none have captured the popular imagination quite like that proposed by a group of scholars in Skaldhome. They believe that the Nordheim reavers took their holy fervor for bloodshed a bit too far, angering the thunder god in their profane excess. Though the skalds' work is shared with other places of learning, one of their number who went to research further among the cantonal dwarves has disappeared entirely.

Several years ago, the animals of the forests surrounding the subterranean ruins of Nordheim fled south as if from a fire, startling the thralls of the Wolfheim dwarves recently brought to the area. After much debate, the dwarves sent a band of moderately armed thralls north into the cold woods to see what drove the creatures out.

The thralls discovered a pit that descended to a ruined dwarven temple. As they debated their next action, they became aware of the total silence of the forest, and then the cause. The thralls were surrounded by a sizeable force of walking dwarven corpses. The thralls beat a slow and wary retreat, but the dead dwarves simply followed, trailing the thralls to the edge of the forest. Hollow sockets in desiccated faces followed their movements, stalking in silence but never closing the distance. When they arrived at the riverbank the corpses advanced no farther but instead withdrew, fading back into the trees.

The skraeling tribes that pass through the region to trade also speak of "ghost elves" in remote places in the mountains, where no elf should ever have been. There has been no interaction with them yet.

OTHER NORTHLANDS LOCATIONS

All these places are legends, and some are said to be no more than idle wind. None are readily found on a map, but surely some are true and could be found by a bold explorer riding a fast sleipnir or steering a dragon-prowed longboat.

BUYAN: Rumors abound of strange and uncanny happenings on the Isle of Buyan: weeks-long lightning storms that echo with words of prophecy, and trees that sway in autumn winds and scatter leaves of silver as large as sails. Legends say the island can be discovered only at certain times of the year, or by destined heroes (who more often than not find their final destiny here), or that it spends summer floating through the oceans of the nine worlds of Yggdrasil. Some say it is a meeting place for the four winds, where Boreas and his siblings gather from time to time. Others claim it is the site of a glorious yet empty city lorded over by Koschei the Deathless, and he hides his corrupt and wretched soul somewhere on the island.

THE BROCH OF GLESTOF: This isle presents visitors with wild, broken cliffs, slick with moss and seagull guano and the wreckage of ancient galleys. Once visitors have scaled its cliffs, a seemingly harmless scrubland of heather and bracken awaits, its gentle slope surmounted by a solitary abandoned tower. Glestof teems with birds taking advantage of the utter lack of other animal life, so during spring and summer passing travelers can reap a rich harvest of eggs from her cliffs. Woe befalls those who visit late in the year though, since no human has ever passed a winter on Glestof and lived to tell the tale—nor do corpses or even bones remain the following spring.

FLYING BJARMIA: This isle of cloud giants spends most of its time high in the sky, but occasionally touches down upon the waves. The Bjarmians claim that the demigod Gulveig was born among them, and each giant is more gold-greedy than a pack of dragons. Even their thralls are richer than dwarven jarls (or so goes the legend). The giants deal in luxuries, rare magic, and valuable objects, but they're sharp-eyed traders and their "deals" have unexpected consequences. Buyers beware!

GROKEHEIM: The delicate spires of Grokeheim rise like gleaming spear points from the headwaters of the largest fjord in the North. Carved entirely from ice, its towers shine when brushed by the least glimmer of sunlight, a lure to passing travelers. This is the realm of Queen Morrinn of Grokeheim, the proud, cruel and cold-hearted Snow Queen, daughter of Boreas. Her ice maidens roam the plains of Frozen Reach with impunity, and travelers who cannot claim good reason to be moving through the queen's territory meet a quick end in their chilling embrace.

Isle of Loki: Dwarven reavers, giants, and humans have avoided this ice-swathed expanse for centuries, ever since oracles proclaimed it the earthly seat of Loki and his private hunting estate. Though thursir giants and crazed southern adventurers sometimes seek to plunder it, it seems to be truly uninhabited except by enigmatic skein witches and the blue-haired derro who do their bidding. Both are known as servants of Loki and hostile to all visitors.

Loki's strange servants protect a powerful magical treasure known as the *Loom of Fables*, an artifact that interfaces with the skein of fate woven by the Norns. The loom does not change reality or fate but copies the Norn's warp and weft, threading divination magic through its heddles (the pins that guide the threads and create the pattern), which are placed where one wishes to deviate from fate. The loom then creates a powerful illusion, interfering with divination magic and obfuscating the truth. The Norns dislike the contraption, but since it does not actually interfere with their work (only the perception of their work) they can or will do little about it.

The *Loom of Fables* requires numerous servants to operate it, and Loki has erected a new hall to protect the artifact. If it is destroyed, the truth of Loki's Ragnarok deception can be exposed.

Isle of Swords: This forested isle was the site of the first holmganga. It remains a venue for anyone with a dispute that can only be settled in blood. Just over a mile in diameter, the island's barrows, pine copses, and shingle beaches have seen the end of many feuds—and lives. Once two combatants step onto the isle, Wotan's shield maidens ensure the score is settled without interference, and the god's curse falls on any who dare to flee before the bloody work is done.

The Order of the Thunderer has been searching for a complete version of a ritual said to summon a target to the island. They seek the spell as a way to force confrontations early, before they have the opportunity to fester and draw others into bloody feuds . . . or so they say. Their primary motivation, however, is to draw members of the Cult of Ragnarok to the island one by one. Whether such magic truly exists remains a mystery. Some among the order suspect that the recent surfacing of rumors concerning the ritual might actually be part of a trap laid by the cult.

The Phantom Isles: Legend says the Phantom Isles are home to all manner of evils, including aberrant linnorms, curst demons, and exiled godlings. The islands rise and fall beneath the surface of the Uttermost Sea at the whim of fate or the command of the gods. They are not fixed in place at all, but prowl the ocean like hungry wolves. Volcanic mists, hidden reefs, perverse storm winds, and deadly maelstroms surround the isles, making attempts at landfall a risky proposition at best. Visitors to these islands are unfortunates blown off-course and drawn in by sirens or hope of safe harbor. Few have escaped the islands alive and sane, and the isles have never been completely mapped or catalogued, so Wotan alone knows how many there truly are or what manner of creatures may make these cursed shores their lair.

Shoals of the Selkies: An arc of seaweed-shrouded boulders worn round by the waves, here selkies and other sea-folk gather each summer for a Þing, and at other times to lure incautious sailors to their doom with smiles and charms. The rocks are littered with the bones of foolish Northlanders, and silver rings and gold bracers are scattered among the remains, seemingly abandoned by the sea folk.

Vættir Mounds: Populated by warriors fallen in the skirmishes between coastal thorps and Northlanders, barrows are common along the Reaver Coast. Many double as beacons to warn of attack. Locals honor the dead within with regular prayers and gifts, and in exchange, raiders find an undead warrior or three waiting to greet them. With each raid the vættir grow greedier, and it can't be long before their demands for treasure become even more intolerable than those of the raiders.

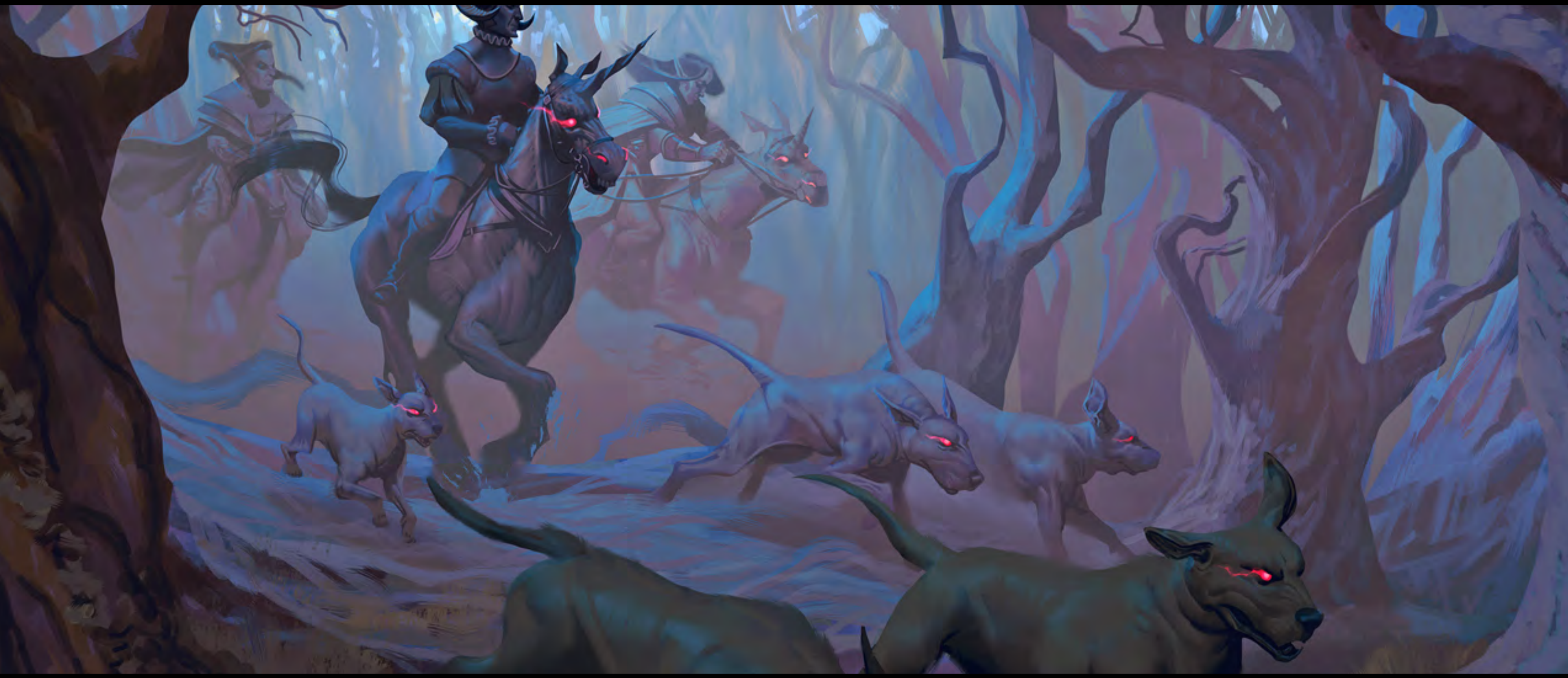
Hidden Kingdom of Hyperborea

Stories say that beneath the apex of world where polar lights cavort in drifting streams, the island of Hyperborea explodes with verdant life. Here mortal laws of nature bend and crumble and Midgard mingles with the unbounded energies of the Outer Planes, in seven cities on the Thulang Plateau.

The sun rises and sets only once each year, living colors dance in the air, and a lost world's basaltic crypts and ancient tombs hold treasures and horrors of a primordial age. In a caldera thrusting up from the Lung of the Sea, the borders of Hyperborea are reinforced by massive ramparts of rune-carved granite. Scaling their icy surface is like climbing a cliff made of glass, but four massive barbicans breech their otherwise unbroken circle, each sealed with a priceless gate of prismatic steel big enough to swallow two longships sailing abreast.

Covered by layer upon layer of ice, the gates have not opened in millennia. Within the frosty walls the air is as warm as the deserts of Siwal and lush vegetation erupts from swampy volcanic earth. Hot springs create an unworldly mist that wriggles between jungle trees and nurtures vines and tiny flowers found nowhere else in the world. Few ever reach its warmth, or survive its dangers.

THE SHADOW REALM



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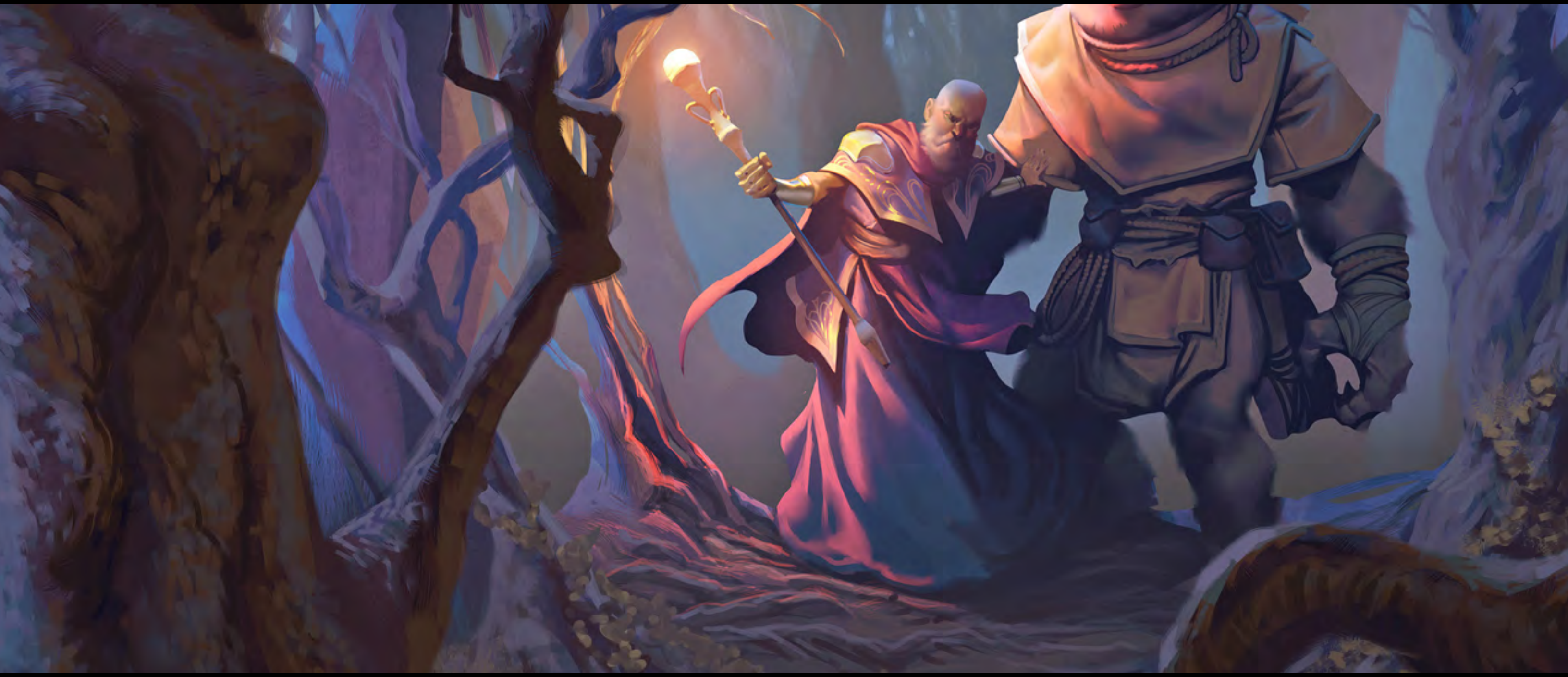
Shadow. Wherever you walk in all the realms of Midgard, it surrounds you. It lies beneath the sun-dappled waves of grass on the Rothenian Plain and between the sky-scraping peaks of the Ironcrags. It echoes your footsteps in the alleys of Zobeck and reaches down from the starry sky in the frozen Northlands. It rises up from the lightless caverns where the ghouls feast or is carried on the wind through the sandstorms of the Southlands. The Shadow Realm always lurks just on the other side of the light, watching. Waiting. Yearning.

Just as an oak tree casts dancing shadows of its leaves and a stretched, darkened effigy of its trunk against the light of day, so too does the world of Midgard cast a shadow. The Shadow Realm exists as a place of dark reflections and distorted expectations. Another plane of reality, it stands alongside and beneath the material world—the middle of the coin between Midgard and the far side of the universe. Dark magic seethes here, spawning creatures unlike anything else in existence. The place also beckons mortal creatures, tempting them with whispered secrets and forgotten power. The touch of the Shadow Realm can be a great asset, but that power comes at a terrible cost.



Shadow fey nobles ride to the hunt in the gloom of the Shadow Realm, while a bearfolk warden helps a traveler.

The sky of the Shadow Realm appears as a perpetual smear of charcoal, only ever reaching twilight illumination. Stars gleam through the gloom for brief moments before strange clouds swallow them up again. There is no sun; a diffuse, weak, natural illumination has no discernible source other than the faintly luminous sky. Muted colors appear dull in Shadow. Even colors brought into the realm from Midgard fade and wash out. If they linger long enough, their vibrancy fails to return even when returned to Midgard.

If one could look down from a star's-eye view, the Shadow Realm would resemble Midgard as seen through a smoked glass mirror. Prominent Midgard landmarks have echoes in the Shadow Realm, often playing host to similar, or sometimes opposite, essences. A population center in Midgard might correspond to a city or town where natives of the umbral plane live and scheme. Or it could hold a blighted desolation of tumbled stones and salted fields where a settlement once stood.

The Shadow Realm's waterways—streams, lakes, and rivers—are even more disturbing. Instead of water, they contain rushing torrents or rippling tracts of pure shadow. Two major waterways twist like ribbons of black silk across the plane; the Rivers Styx and Lethe. Their tributaries and minor outlets reach nearly every corner of the realm, providing accessways if one can survive the perils of a waterborne journey. The shores of the Shadow Realm look out on the inky expanse of the Shade Sea, an endless, roiling stretch of wavering darkness.

Despite the overall similarities, a keen understanding of Midgard's geography does not provide a key to navigating the Shadow Realm. The plane stretches and twists, distorted in dimension and shape when compared to places in the material world. Distances can deceive an unwary traveler, and directions become confused. Relationships between places in Shadow even change over time, the way a shadow lengthens and shrinks as the sun travels across the day. A mountain pass might lead to a vast forest one year and to a desert of black sand the next. While the distortion of the landed regions of the Shadow Realm can be vexing enough, the vast emptiness of the Shade Sea is completely unpredictable. Few crews brave or unfortunate enough to venture out on the open Shade Sea have ever returned, and those that did were never the same.

Few visitors willingly travel to the Shadow Realm, and most have at least some understanding of the place before they cross that threshold. From mighty wizards who weave magic to bear them beyond the light to brash explorers who discover the secrets of a forgotten passage into darkness, these adventurers should know what awaits them. Some Midgard cultures nurture a relationship with the Shadow Realm, though these are often misunderstood or rightly feared. The trollkin share an ancient bond of blood with creatures who dwell in Shadow, and the elves of Arbonesse walk secret paths that lead beyond the material world.

NATURE OF DARKNESS

Beyond the physical locations with parallels in Midgard that make up this dark counterpart, twisted plants and animals, as well as strange laws of nature, also exist in Shadow. The realm has no day and night cycle, but instead a perpetual twilight cloaks the realm. This dim, ambient illumination deepens into full darkness in the valleys and canyons that crisscross the land. This illumination isn't sunlight, and creatures that suffer in the sun, including vampires, endure it without difficulty.

VARIANT: SHADOW-TOUCHED BEASTS

Beasts in the Shadow Realm adapt to the plane's unique nature. Shadowy reflections of ordinary beasts have darkvision out to 60 feet and are resistant to cold damage. At the GM's discretion, these traits fade away a week after the beast leaves Shadow.

Natural life in Shadow survives as one would expect given the surrounding terrain. Trees and undergrowth fill the dark forests. Birds fly above and nest among twisted branches. Herd animals wander the plains. Fish swim through the black rivers and murky lakes. Every creature native to the Shadow Realm is at best a dark reflection of its counterpart in the material world, and at worst a barely recognizable mockery. Shadow taints everything. The owl-like but human-mouthed strix ghost glides on silent wings through dark forests. Shadow fey nobles capture and tend flocks of steel-winged eala, and the corrupted, unicorn-like shadhavar wander the woods and race across the plains. Predatory beasts such as wolves, bears, and hawks are more common than prey, but how they manage to survive given the lack of an abundant food source remains a mystery.

Finding fresh water presents the most pressing challenge in the Shadow Realm, since darkness flows through the waterways instead of water. This inky substance quenches the thirst of the denizens of Shadow, but visitors find it bitter and unpleasant. That said, this inky liquid can be consumed and provides refreshment, but it carries the taint of shadow corruption (see Appendix). A few springs produce pure water, and sometimes a stream runs clear for a brief time before darkness fills it again. These precious resources nourish the few denizens of the realm that haven't given themselves over to the plane's corruption, and they guard them viciously.

As for food, fruit-bearing plants yield their bounty (though their produce appears black and glossy), and animals can be hunted for meat. Whether fruit or meat, food gathered in Shadow tastes bland and often hints at something unpleasant, such as rot or mold. Ability checks made to forage for food and water suffer disadvantage, yielding half the normal amount of edible food or potable water. Brave or desperate characters can choose to forage as normal (without disadvantage and for a full yield), but any creature who consumes food gathered in this way suffers exposure to shadow corruption.

DARK WATER

The black shadows that pass for water in the Shadow Realm run swift and cold, so cold that no matter the surrounding terrain or climate, every stream or river or lake in the plane counts as frigid water. Worse, the spirits of things that died in or near the water constitute a hazard of the plane. A creature that starts its turn in dark water must succeed on a DC 12 Strength or Fortitude saving throw or be grappled and pulled 5 feet deeper into the water by the hungry spirits. The grappled condition lasts until the start of the creature's next turn. These ghosts long to drag every living thing they encounter into the inky depths, and even watercraft provide uncertain protection against these spirits.

A creature that drowns in dark water can't be returned to life by *revivify* or *raise dead*. More powerful magic, such as *resurrection*, is necessary to free the creature's soul.

Doomsand

Similar in most ways to standard quicksand, doomsand follows the same rules for sinking and escaping. This ashen-gray slurry is infused with the nature of Shadow, and it drains the resolve from those in its grasp. A creature that starts its turn in an area of doomsand must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or become despondent (see Appendix). When the creature finishes a long rest it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. Doomsand usually appears in marshes and swamps, or in deserts as fine dust.

Hungry Gloom

Some areas of the Shadow Realm, or places in Midgard where the barrier between Shadow and light is thin, develop hungry gloom. An area of hungry gloom appears particularly dark and grim, swallowing light that enters it. An area of light that overlaps hungry gloom has its illumination reduced by one step (bright light becomes dim, dim light becomes darkness). Darkvision can't improve the ambient light conditions in the area. Shadow-touched creatures (see Appendix) can see in hungry gloom as if it were bright light.

Doorways to Shadow

The Shadow Realm exists apart from Midgard, but the world's reflection is also a manifestation of its fears and hopelessness. The most common way to enter Shadow is through use of the aptly named shadow roads, and any spell or ability that allows travel between the planes can transport characters there.

Convergence

The Shadow Realm draws heavily on symbolism and resonance, both magical and mundane. It is a symbol of the darker nature of Midgard, and its power waxes and wanes with natural conditions that align with or oppose that nature. During certain times of the year, the barrier between worlds grows thin. Usually that's not enough to create a passage, but it can draw creatures that aid in the barrier's erosion. The depth of winter, particularly the solstice, resonates with the cold dark of Shadow. Festivals at this time of year celebrate the sun's return. In part, these celebrations are in defiance to the very real danger surrounding them on that night. Lanterns and bonfires drive back the darkness on the longest night, and joyous revelry weakens the power of Shadow. Solar eclipses and (as the elves claim) the ascendance of the fabled planet Melgros demonstrate Shadow's strength.

The deepest caverns and tunnels beneath Midgard have never seen sunlight, and these tracks sometimes bore not only through the rock and earth, but through the veil of Shadow as well. Explorers fleeing the fangs of a darakhul patrol might inadvertently cross over into another world.

Erosion

Interplay between Midgard and the Shadow Realm takes place constantly. Events and people in one can lead to a change in the other, and it's possible for some actions to form a connection between the two. Traumatic events that breed sadness and drag down hope become chisels that chip away at the boundary between the planes.

Murders and executions create an atmosphere of fear and oppression, and a place commonly used for such bloody work takes on an air of unease. An orphanage where children languish until all hope for love and acceptance dies grows darker with each passing year, as do sanitariums and mortuaries. In such places, doorways can open into the Shadow Realm.

Magic in the Shadow Realm

The Shadow Realm vibrates with magic. Creatures saturated or corrupted by its influence sometimes develop powerful magical abilities. With such magic woven into its very nature, spells and other magic used within its borders can produce unexpected effects. Most of these effects appear unsettling but are merely cosmetic. Spells that create light glow with a sickly green, blue, or purple illumination. Energy created by spells pulsates with black veins, writhes in dark flames, or crackles with black lightning. Conjured animals are drawn from the variety found in the Shadow Realm, with pale or dark coats and coldly gleaming eyes.

The Magic of Shadow and Light

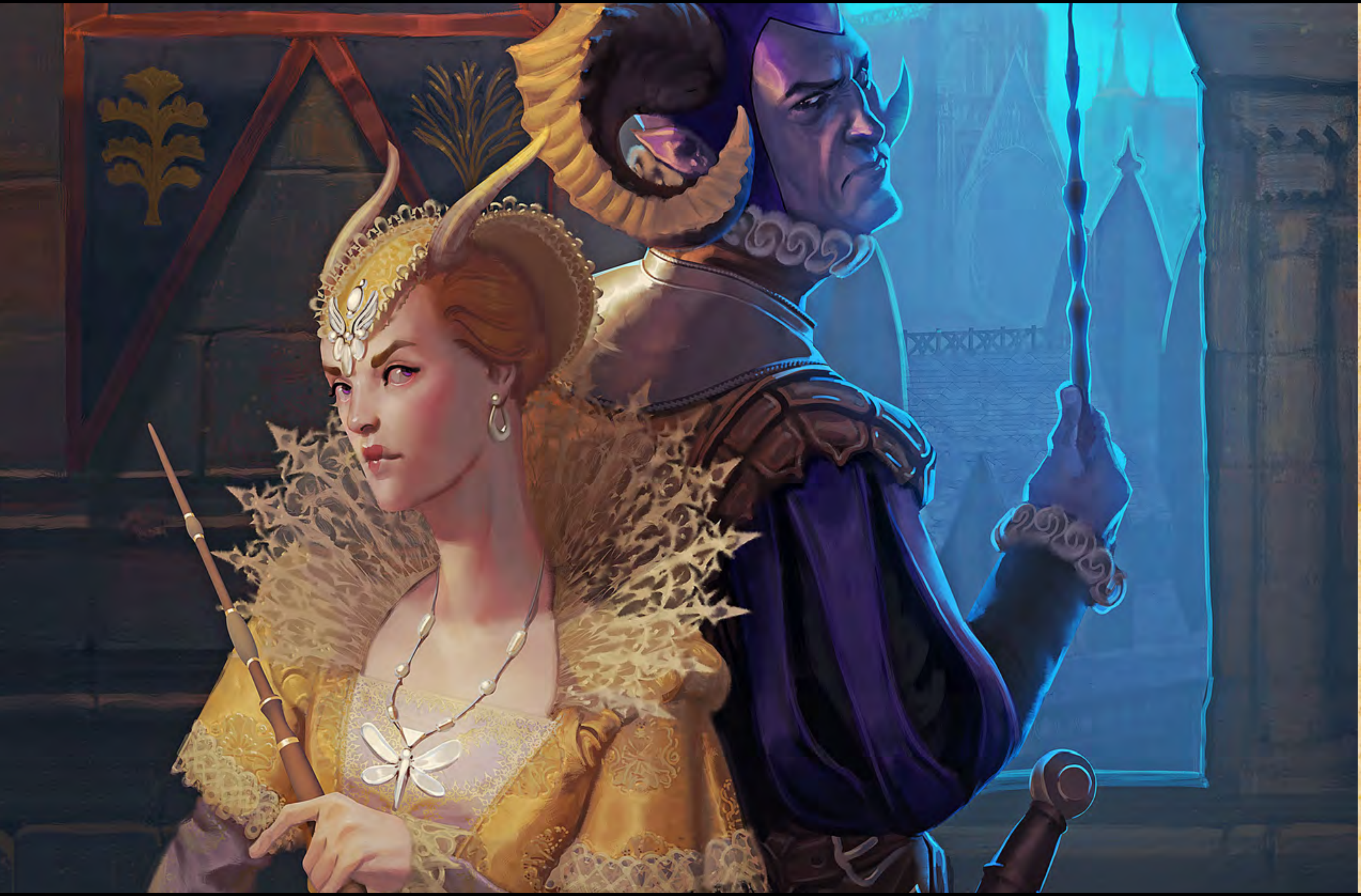
Apart from leaving its mark on magic brought into the domain, the Shadow Realm spawns new and enigmatic magic. Spellcasters seeking paths to power and shadow fey living in the depths of Shadow have developed two disciplines of magic: the studies of illumination and shadow magic.

Illumination magic deals in duality, befitting its origin among the shadow fey. Utilizing the extremes of light and darkness, illumination magic draws on portents written in the stars to glimpse the future, channel starfire, and more safely control the powers of Shadow. For more information on illumination magic, see *Deep Magic* or *MHH*.

Hook: The Hedge Maze

Robbed! Some valuable possession or crucial letter ends up in the hands of a thief, and the characters chase down the culprit through a darkened garden at night. Pursuing the thief into a hedge maze, the characters quickly become lost in the dark, claustrophobic paths. They soon realize something isn't right, and when they emerge from the topiaries the characters find themselves stranded in Shadow.

Was this merely coincidence, or did someone arrange to have them lose their way in the maze at midnight?



Born of Darkness

Humanoids corrupted by Shadow pass the taint of darkness on to their offspring. Over generations, children of these shadowy lineages change. These benighted children are known as dark folk. They inherently shun the light and seek out shadow and gloom, and many manifest innate shadow magic abilities as they grow older.

Dark folk are shadow-touched humanoids. They create or join shadow cults and never feel truly at home except in an area suffused with the Shadow Realm's creeping grasp, or better still within the Shadow Realm.

The dark practice of shadow magic owes its origin to mortal sorcerers, wizards, and warlocks who craved power and thought they understood the risks inherent in obtaining it. Unlike the light and darkness bent through illumination magic, shadow magic taps into the raw stuff of Shadow and brings it to bear. This magic is rarely discovered without a bargain, and never without a price. For more information on shadow magic, see the *Midgard Heroes Handbook*.

Denizens of Darkness

Creatures of terrible intellect, complex society, and dark appetites make their home in the Shadow Realm. These natives live and breathe the dark magical nature of the realm and are not susceptible to the corruptive influence of Shadow. Indeed, foolish or desperate mortals seek these entities for a quick path to power through pacts or bargains. The most powerful among these dark denizens are only too eager to dole out the secrets of shadow magic—the better to incite corruption and ensnare new servants. The natives of the Shadow Realm are the shadow fey, umbral vampires, and a splinter empire of darakhul.

Though the majority of the sentient beings that call Shadow home are dangerous, if not outright vile, some goodness exists as well. Living beings who by their own good nature and resolve have learned the secret of resisting Shadow corruption carved out a home amid the darkness. Other creatures of contemplative mystery and inscrutable motivation live in Shadow as well. The enigmatic witchlights drift through the Shadow Realm with no known home, or even a decisive origin. Similarly, a strange group of dark fey and celestial creatures dwell above the Shadow Realm's surface, in floating aeries with a clear view of the stars. Perhaps the strangest of the Shadow Realm's denizens are the bearfolk; they maintain close ties with their kin in Björnrike in Midgard and represent the only stable force for light and purity in Shadow.

The Lantern Bearers

Shadow by its very nature cannot exist without light, and it is distinct from absolute darkness. Even here amid the temptations and dangers, glimmers of light and rays of hope persist. Occasionally the curtain of gloom grows thin. Places nestled among darkened glades and deep caverns achieve a sort of equilibrium. These locations offer respite from the more taxing nature of the Shadow Realm where visitors can rest and recuperate. Often, creatures native to Shadow that haven't fully given in to its corruptive nature claim these places. They might be exiles who chafe under their current leadership, a native people that have yet to lose their way, or even inscrutable beings who keep their motivations to themselves.

Whatever their nature, each enclave of the light maintains at least minimal contact with another such haven. That one in turn shares ties to another or several, and so it goes until a loose network forms that stretches from border to wavering border of the Shadow Realm. These unlikely champions of the light, known to but a few, are referred to as the Lantern Bearers. Explorers who seek safe passage out of Shadow, or whose aims oppose the more benighted denizens, would do well to search out this network and forge a bond of trust. But those beings who dwell in Shadow while resisting its temptations know that the tide of darkness rises against them. Spies of the shadow fey courts, ravenous ghouls, the mad umbral vampires, and other, stranger things constantly threaten the Lantern Bearers.

Heart of the Shadow Fey

Chief among the Shadow Realm natives, the shadow fey were once elves like any other on the face of Midgard or the Fair Lands. The shadow fey made a dreadful choice when the power of elves waned. Instead of fading in decline, they chose to give themselves over to the powers of Shadow. Better to rule in the shadows, they said, than wither in the light. Among the oldest of the Shadow-corrupted, they are now reborn as a separate race of elves native to the Shadow Realm. Their long-standing experience with the corruptive nature of the Shadow Realm and its magic has made them canny, deadly negotiators. They alone among the peoples of Midgard understand Shadow well enough to embrace its magic without being utterly consumed.

Seat of Power: Courts of the Shadow Fey

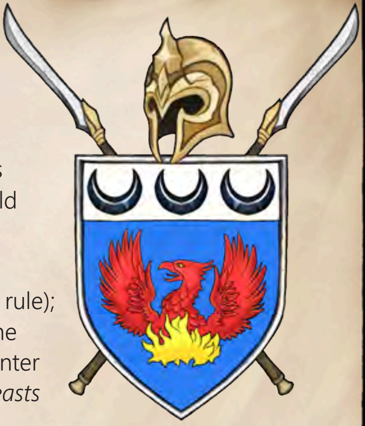
The shadow fey travel the entirety of the Shadow Realm thanks to their affinity to the plane and their extensive control of the shadow roads, but their power resides in the Courts of the Shadow Fey. The Courts rest on a high plateau in the heart of a dark forest in the (approximate) center of the Shadow Realm. This location corresponds to the Margreve Forest in Midgard, and the twin woods share a strong resemblance and active shadow road connections. Major changes in one location have an impact on the appearance and nature of the other.

The Courts rise from the windswept rock of the cliffs in the forest's center, monochrome architecture at once both delicate and indomitable. Graceful spans of black stone bridge chasms hundreds of feet deep, and marble colonnades guide supplicants through fantastic gardens to the inner halls. The gray-twilight gloom of the Shadow Realm breaks in the sky above the Courts of the Shadow Fey, allowing the stars to occasionally show their glittering points of light to those that study illumination magic. Even the moon shines directly on the Moonlit King's home-in-exile, the Tower of the Moon.

Despite the opulence of the architecture, newcomers to the Courts of the Shadow Fey can't help but wonder why the halls are entirely deserted. The only creatures present to greet first-time supplicants are strange constructed footmen—empty suits of graceful plate armor. Exploration of the halls reveals room after empty room, save for crows and rooks, owls, and the occasional scurrying mouse. In truth, this is a powerful illusion and the first line of defense against any uninvited guests. If supplicants have an invitation from a shadow fey of sufficient standing, or if they can prove to the invisible fey that they're worth talking to, the illusion fades and reveals the courts in all their glory. Magic less powerful than *true seeing* can't penetrate this invisibility, as intruders have learned far too late.

The Courts of the Shadow Fey consist of three main sections: the Royal Halls, the Winter Palace, and the Lower Court. The population of the Courts is always in flux, with only the most noble and lofty members of the court (and their servants, consorts, and courtesans) in permanent residence within the Royal Halls and Winter Palace. The Lower Court plays host to the Goblin Court, led by Moggo the Chamberlain, and houses the shadow fey guards and soldiers. These shadow-corrupted goblins serve the shadow fey, and Moggo rules as a tyrant. The goblins won't directly betray their shadow fey masters, but they serve as excellent sources of information, for they love to gossip and gripe. Likewise, the shadow fey don't care much if guests mistreat the goblin servants, but they draw the line at maiming and killing. Should low-status visitors break any of the rules of the Courts, they find themselves sent to Moggo for judgment. The atmosphere in the Goblin Court ripples with betrayal, flattery, bribes, and blood.

THE COURTS OF THE SHADOW FEY



Symbol: Three black crescents over a phoenix on a blue field

Ruler: Sarastra Aestruum, the Queen of Night and Magic (during the Summer Court's rule); Ludomir Imbrium the XVI, the Moonlit King (during the Winter Court's rule); see *Tome of Beasts* for both

Important Personages: Hander Svenk, the Black Prince (NE male shadow fey); Kaedrin Blackwing, Commander of Horn and Gold (LN male shadow fey [see *Tome of Beasts 2*]); Revich the Blind Seer (LG planetar [angel]); the Lord of the Hunt (LN fey lord [see *Tome of Beasts*]); Analissa, Verousha, and Lyssalyn, the Ladies of Nightbrook (NE night hag coven); Yleira the Swift, Baroness of the Sable Court (N female shadow fey)

Population: 1,500,000 (1,000,000 shadow fey, 300,000 goblins, 150,000 dark fey, supplicants, and traders)

Major Enclaves: Corremel, City of Lanterns population 50,000 (30,000 shadow fey, 15,000 goblins, 5,000 dark fey and traders); Hunt's Retreat population 7,700 (4,000 shadow fey, 3,000 shadow goblins, 500 gnomes, 200 humans), Dalliance population 6,700 (4,400 shadow goblins, 2,000 shadow fey, 300 elves); Wormwood population 3,500 (1,800 shadow fey, 900 goblins, 800 gnomes), Courts of the Shadow Fey population 300 (150 shadow fey, 100 goblins, 50 supplicants to the court); Nightbrook Court population 100; Sable Court population 100; Tower of Horn and Gold population 50

Great Gods: Sarastra (patron), Anu-Akma, Charun, the Hunter, Loki

Trade Goods: Secrets, fey wine, metalwork, jewelry, memories, illumination magic, shadow magic

HIGHBORN RULERS

The true rulers of the shadow fey reside in the upper portions of the Courts, in the Winter Palace and the Royal Halls. The Winter Palace functions as the traditional seat of the Moonlit King, though he only walks its halls when the strange seasons of fey rule turn and his Winter Court ascends. It has been many years since the seasons last turned, and in all that time the Moonlit King has been banished to the faraway Tower of the Moon. Rumors run rampant in the Moonlit King's long absence, and whispers circulate through the halls that he's gone mad, plotted a coup, thrown in his lot with devils, or otherwise lost the favor of his wife, the Queen of Night and Magic.

Whatever the truth of these whispers, the Courts agree that the queen considers replacing her wayward king. The Courts function in his absence, with consorts and courtesans, servants, and lower-status members not respected enough for regular entrance to the Royal Halls. The Gray Ladies dwell here, three ancient shadow fey crones with an affinity for spiders and weaving. They spend their days spinning silk and whispering to one another, searching for individuals they can use to bend fate to their whims.

Ultimate power over shadow fey society (and by extension much of the Shadow Realm) rests with Her Transcendent Majesty, Sarastra Aestruum, the Queen of Night and Magic. She dwells in the Royal Halls, along with the upper crust of shadow fey society. Only the most respected supplicants receive invitations to enter the Royal Halls for audience, and of these most receive only a sliver of the queen's attention. They make their obeisance, ask a favor, and quickly get handed off to Court functionaries.

A lucky few, however, manage to catch the queen's interest. No matter the apparent circumstance, this always furthers the queen's designs or appeases a momentary whim. Her Majesty's direct attention is never taken lightly and sudden alliances or rivalries spontaneously spring up around visitors so "blessed." The Royal Halls also host honored guests, usually envoys from another fey court.

Finally, the Courts contain a strange pit called the Black Well of Night. A cavern at the bottom of the well houses Akyishigal the Demon Lord of Roaches and his roachling servants, creatures of filth and evil. The demon lord chafes under his current servitude to the queen and seeks potential allies to turn the tide against his "hostess" and win his freedom.

CORREMEL, CITY OF LANTERNS

Gleaming astride the black River Lethe rests the shadow fey city of Corremel, City of Lanterns. The city is well named—lanterns of black iron, sparkling silver, and polished glass constantly burn bright in all corners of the city. The streets are well lit, shops and inns spill light onto the charcoal gray cobblestones, and even the city watch carry distinctive lanterns as badges of office. The Lethe splits the city in half, its black, specter-filled depths spanned by a marvelous bridge of white marble.

Hander Svenk, the Black Prince of the shadow fey, rules Corremel and the surrounding territory. When he isn't hunting or at the Courts, he sees to the operation and disposition of his home with meticulous care. Corremel provides one of the few ways to safely cross the Lethe, and as such it enjoys status as one of the rare trade hubs in the Shadow Realm. Creatures from all nations of Shadow, as well as visitors from Midgard, mingle in the brightly lit squares and marketplaces. A shadow road runs the length of the River Lethe, connecting the Shadow Realm to the Crossroads area of central Midgard, not far from the Free City of Zobeck. Smugglers, slave traders, merchants of varying scruples, bounty hunters, and spies all bask in the light of the City of Lanterns.

A second shadow road connects the River Lethe to the River Nuria, and the city of Corremel-in-Shadow has some arcane connection to the Nurian city of Corremel.

Dalliance

A small town where the Nightbrook spills into the River Lethe, Dalliance earns a modest amount of coin and favors as a trading post for forest-dwelling trappers and loggers, and serves as a stopping point for the water fey from Nightbrook Court. The hamlet's real stock in trade, however, is pleasure and excess. The largest buildings in the town are the pleasure houses that cater to any taste, from the everyday to the wildly exotic. Pleasurable company, illicit substances, and any manner of amusement—no matter how taboo—can be purchased for the right price and if one can find the right ear to whisper in. Despite this reputation, Dalliance remains out of the way, discrete, and perfect for those who want to keep their pleasures private.

Hunt's Retreat

Nestled at the midpoint of a hunting path between the road bisecting the forest and the cliffs of the Courts of the Shadow Fey stands a great wood and stone lodge. This is the Hunt's Retreat, a haven for the hunters and trappers who work the Blackwood and the Forest of the Firebirds. It serves as shelter to the weary traveler or lost soul wandering the woods, but it carries dangers of its own. The Black Prince lodges here during his hunting excursions, and the powerful fey lord of the Wild Hunt, the Lord of the Hunt, camps with his retinue just outside the Retreat before sounding the horn and charging into the forest.

Nightbrook Court

A minor court owing fealty to the Courts of the Shadow Fey, Nightbrook Court occupies a hunched building of stone and black wood in the Sable Forest. The structure resembles a temple more than a seat of nobility, and strange glyphs adorn its walls and domed roof. It stands at the headwaters of the Nightbrook, a small black waterway that eventually joins the River Lethe. The shadow fey of Nightbrook Court seem strangely at home upon the Shadow Realm's waters. They live and work along the Nightbrook, offering passage on small boats or rafts from one shore to the other, or even downriver to another settlement—for a price, of course. The vengeful spirits that swarm in the black rivers seem indifferent to them, though none outside the Court's confines know why.

Three sisters rule Nightbrook Court, shadow fey women with sour expressions and back-curving horns. Their wiry, long black hair bears a streak of white in their otherwise midnight tresses. Despite their perpetual glowers, the Ladies of Nightbrook—Analissa, Verousha, and Lyssalyn—welcome guests with surprisingly warm hospitality, particularly mortal guests. The sisters are, in truth, a coven of night hags. They work tirelessly to locate black-hearted people whose dreams they can haunt, hounding the hapless victims to death so they can steal their evil souls. They bring these souls to the headwaters of the Nightbrook, and in a dark ritual that requires a *memory philter* (see Appendix) holding emotions of loss, longing, rage, or bitterness, they twist the souls into hungry shades. Once infused with those hollow emotions, the Ladies pour the souls out of their soul bags into the river to join the others. These souls draw the memories from those they drown and carry them back to the sisters.

Good-hearted visitors to Nightbrook Court have no fear of being murdered for their souls, but their memories remain at risk. The Ladies require a constant supply of appropriate memories to create their spectral spies. If they can bargain or purchase such memories from mortal visitors, so much the better, but they aren't above helping circumstances along to create the memories they require. Perhaps a husband chokes to death on his sumptuous (and cursed or poisoned) dinner in the Court's dining hall, and the sisters offer to soothe his widow's anguish by taking the memory from her.

Sable Court

The Sable Court resides high above the dark Sable Forest floor, nestled in the branches and wrapped around the trunks of great shadow oaks. Sometimes mistaken for a typical elven forest dwelling, the Sable Court brings the power and influence of the Courts of the Shadow Fey into the wood, ensuring that the local inhabitants (particularly the Ladies of Nightbrook Court) remember their place as vassals of the queen and king. Appointed by the Queen of Night and Magic, Baroness Yleira the Swift oversees the shadow fey, goblins, and shadow hounds of this court. The Sable Court can only be reached by magic, a dangerous climb in the sight-line—and bowshot—of the forest sentries, or the series of lifts manned by shadow fey guardians at all times.

The Sable Court serves as the base of operations and training ground for the shadow fey forest hunters. Those shadow fey unfit for life in the Courts or in the more civilized settlements often seek to join the hunters. Deadly assassins, forest guides, and iron-tough trailblazers all rise from the ranks of the forest hunters.

TOWER OF HORN AND GOLD

High in the peaks of the Mistcall Mountains west of the Courts of the Shadow Fey, where gray snow falls like ashes from a pyre, an ancient tower broods—the Tower of Horn and Gold. So high its apex scrapes the perpetual cloud cover, the tower's black stone is hewn from the mountains, though it takes its name from the cladding adorning it. Rows of great, curving horns jut from the tower's surface, giving it a wicked, serrated silhouette. Beneath these foreboding trophies, Shadow-mined gold bands the stone. The metal, a wavering blend of gleaming yellow and pitch black, gives the tower a striated appearance that both catches and absorbs any stray beam of light.

The tower represents one of the oldest remnants of the shadow fey's first incursion into darkness in their desperate bid to remain powerful. While it commands one of the best vantage points in all the Shadow Realm, the Tower of Horn and Gold is no mere watchtower. It stands guard over a cleft in the mountains leading to tunnels that have never seen a single mote of light. Shadow drakes have long lived and died in these caverns, and they maintain a loose, tenuous alliance with the fey occupying the tower. In exchange for the drakes' cooperation in defense of the tower and occasional service as messengers or even mounts to the higher-ranking knights, the shadow fey ensure the drakes have leave to hunt in the surrounding lands. Most important, the shadow fey mine the tunnels for the elusive shadow gold veins that run through them. The drakes earn a generous share of the yield.

Shadow gold is in many ways the same as the gold mined in Midgard, but it holds the essence of Shadow within it. In its raw form, the metal appears as a mottled mix of gold and black. When the metal is cast or forged and polished, its color and luster become indistinguishable from normal gold. Only when the metal is molten, nicked, bent, or scratched is its true nature revealed. Any damage to the metal shows the shadow within.

The shadow fey mint coins of this shadow gold and trade it generously to mortals in payment or bribery. It is said that with each shadow gold coin one accepts from the fey, one loses more and more of one's will and soul to them. Greed remains a powerful force, however, and shadow fey diplomats, emissaries, and spies liberally buy whatever, and whoever, they need with the tainted coins.

WORMWOOD

In the northernmost reach of the heartland of the shadow fey stands the gate town of Wormwood. It guards the road into the dark woods that leads to the Courts of the Shadow Fey and eventually to Corremel. A formidable wall with stout shadow oak wood gates at the north and south encircles the small settlement. The inhabitants of Wormwood are all battle-tested soldiers, with a few spies and assassins thrown into the mix. Wormwood serves as a bulwark against the umbral vampires and their minions from the City Fallen into Shadow. They regard travelers with tight scrutiny and heavy suspicion, and take a pitch-black view of anyone carrying relics from the umbral vampire city without express leave of the Queen of Night and Magic or another high-ranking shadow fey noble.

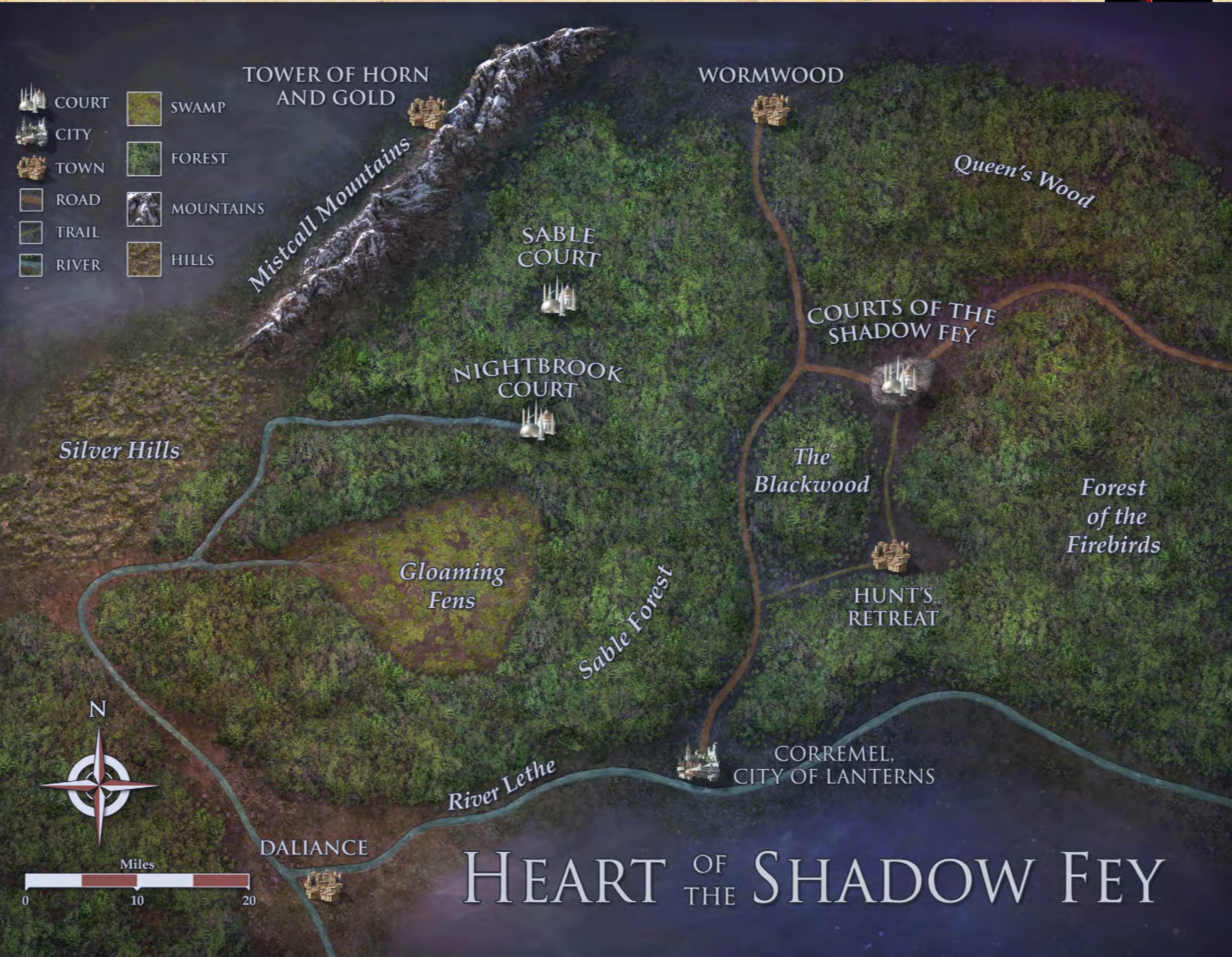
OUTSIDER RELATIONS

The shadow fey view themselves as the rightful rulers of the Shadow Realm, and they have formal embassies or nominal contact with all other sentient denizens. Ambassadors of the Courts of the Shadow Fey maintain a regular presence with the Twilight Empire of darakhul in their blackened depths, and even with the bearfolk of the Moonlit Glades. Admittedly the latter is a more tenuous contact, and though the shadow fey officially have a permanent embassy among the bearfolk, both races prefer to keep the actual presence of shadow fey envoys as temporary as possible. The Court of One Million Stars communicates with the shadow fey, but they allow no permanent presence in their lofty abodes. The shadow fey have no interest in trying to forge a permanent presence among the umbral vampires, and the umbral vampires would likely kill any who tried.

In recent years, the shadow fey have reestablished contact and opened negotiations with the mortals of Midgard. Regular trade in exotic goods crafted by shadow fey artisans has grown in Zobeck, and the demand for shadow fey blades, jewelry, curios, and marvelously potent wines now spreads beyond the Crossroads.

The shadow fey traders care little for gold in exchange for their wares and are more interested in a far-stranger commodity—painful memories. Through arcane rites and incantations, the shadow fey take the memories of a mortal who willingly agrees to give them up. The shadow fey distill these memories into strange spirits, each with a distinct flavor. Memories both grim and joyful are valuable to the shadow fey, and their answer to queries as to why is always the same: "It warms us." So far the trade has been limited due to the dangers of the shadow roads, but the merchants who deal in shadow fey goods swear by the profits. The loss of a painful memory in exchange for a chest of fey-forged moonsteel weapons seems a price so paltry as to be stealing. A few question the wisdom of giving up pieces of their lives bit by bit in exchange for mere wealth. Some merchants have begun contemplating alternate donors as a source of memories.

Beyond trade in goods, the shadow fey brokers secrets and power. Not only is their knowledge of the Shadow Realm and the roads that crisscross it vast, but many recall the events of ancient history as if they happened yesterday. Lost tombs, forgotten artifacts, and ancient knowledge have all been recovered thanks to shadow fey information brokers. The shadow fey also peddle true power in the form of rare magic. They trade in illumination magic that blends the power of starlight with the cold depths of Shadow. Likewise, for those who seek quick power, shadow magic sits on the auction block. The shadow fey merely request that a student join them in the Shadow Realm as their


HEART OF THE SHADOW FEY
TOWER OF HORN AND GOLD
WORMWOOD
Queen's Wood
Mistcall Mountains
SABLE COURT
COURTS OF THE SHADOW FEY
NIGHTBROOK COURT
Silver Hills
The Blackwood
Forest of the Firebirds
Gloaming Fens
Sable Forest
HUNT'S RETREAT
CORREMEL, CITY OF LANTERNS
River Lethe
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CITY
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ROAD
TRAIL
RIVER
SWAMP
FOREST
MOUNTAINS
HILLS

quest for tutelage, despite the fact that these extended visits carry the risk of shadow corruption for mortal visitors. Whispers abound that the shadow fey, by dark and terrible means, can transform a sufficiently shadow-corrupted individual into one of their own, creating a new fey from a corrupted mortal.

FACETS BOTH BRIGHT AND DARK

Though the shadow fey act as purveyors of darkness and sorrow, some light glimmers among their ranks. A secret society hides within the Courts of the Shadow Fey, known as the Lords of Light. Led by the blind seer Revich, this close-knit group of shadow fey and allied creatures seeks out and eliminates demonic influences wherever they find it. Revich keeps to himself in a tower in the Courts of the Shadow Fey. The Lords of Light cautiously conceal their nature and approach potential initiates only after assurance of their trustworthiness and righteous nature. They also maintain contact with a handful of Lantern Bearer enclaves, hoping that word of creatures of suitable character might filter to them through the network. Good creatures who run afoul of the shadow fey might find an unlikely ally in an innocuous-seeming servant or a shadow fey duelist seeking redemption.

Conversely, the shadow fey are also inextricably bound to some of the most potent creatures of darkness. Carrying the taint of the Abyss, the deceptively beautiful fiends known as the heralds of darkness build cults dedicated to themselves. These groups view the herald that leads it as a godlike being, hoping for its favor and a small measure of its power. The shadow fey have few qualms assisting a herald of darkness, because the fiend's most potent ability works in their favor. In addition to its formidable combat prowess, the herald of darkness has the power to infuse any non-shadow fey, human, or goblin with the essence of pure Shadow. If it accepts the infusion, the creature becomes one of the shadow fey.

OSHRAGORA, THE CITY FALLEN INTO SHADOW

Once men and women, the umbral vampires now exist as twisted fiends sustained by the power of Shadow and hungry for the life they once held. Not undead but fully creatures of the Shadow Realm, umbral vampires resemble pale, gaunt humanoids with long pointed ears and sharp features. Their eyes, mouth, and nose weep darkness that flows like smoke, and their touch drains the life and vitality from their victims. More shade than substance, they can slip through solid material to reach their prey or to flee from the light. They drift through the City Fallen into Shadow, a crumbling ruin twisted through space and time and filled with the shadows of hubris and torment.

SUNDERED HISTORY

The greatest cautionary tale of the Shadow Realm is undoubtedly that of the umbral vampires. Once residents of a thriving metropolis, the rulers of this forgotten city were powerful spellcasters whose might dwarfed even the greatest sorcerers of this age. They were wise and just and used their power to preserve the glory of their people. Their decline began subtly, in an effort to prevent the inevitable march of time. The great archmages twisted time and forced it to divert its flow. The entire population of the great city freed themselves of the shackles of age and death.

For generations they existed in this state, developing even greater magic, fine art, and architecture to rival the palaces of the gods. But for all their wisdom and might, they were blind to the danger set before them. As the river of time in the world around the city flowed on, it began to erode the spells holding it at bay. Eventually the spells failed and the city drowned in the many years it denied. In the rush of uncontrolled magic and rampantly fluctuating time, the entire city vanished from the mortal world. Only the barest traces remain. Their entire city was pulled into the darkness between worlds. The people of the once-great city felt the ravages of shadow corruption, but they were trapped in chaotic temporal storms. They spent an eternity in that closed loop of time, devoured by Shadow, only to be reborn and consumed again until finally the time storm abated.

When the winds of history settled, Oshragora, the City Fallen into Shadow, was born. Great, towering ruins appeared in the landscape of the Shadow Realm. Cobbled streets cracked and twisted, following new maddened paths dictated by Shadow's distortions. Buildings that once touched the sky now stand in a frozen jumble of collapse, held in unstable pockets of temporal stasis. These pockets fail, unwind, and reassert themselves at random. Bits of the city crumble or reassemble before an observer's eyes.

The city defies conventional understanding of geography and space, even among other places in the Shadow Realm. While the rest of the plane shifts over the course of months or years, the City Fallen into Shadow seems to change without a predictable pattern or schedule.

INSCRUTABLE AND UNCOUNTABLE

Oshragora isn't sufficiently organized to be called a nation. An unknown number of umbral vampires lurk in its crumbled buildings and shadow-choked alleys. Despite repeated attempts, no scouting force or explorer has ever made an accurate estimate of the city's cursed population. Umbral vampires simply slip between the cracks of reality, as if they're still shifting through time and space. One half-mad shadow fey forest hunter raved that she fought and slew the same umbral vampire for weeks while lost in a forest that continually coiled back on itself.

The umbral vampires' motivations remain obscure, or at least prone to chaotic shifts. On occasion one might be willing to speak with visitors rather than simply devouring their essence, but these conversations always prove frustrating. The vampires mention events out of chronological order and make references to people and places no sage can identify. In spite of this, they give the impression that they understand far more than they're able to effectively communicate. Shadow fey emissaries are certain that a ruling council still exists somewhere in the city, but the place's unstable nature has made it impossible to find. The Queen of Night and Magic has proclaimed that she will trade an emperor's ransom in treasure and secrets for a reliable connection to the umbral vampires' dark council.

Despite the difficulty of operating within the city and communicating with the vampires, other creatures exist there. Undead shadows thrive in and around the city (and the splinters of the city that appear elsewhere), drifting in the wake of umbral vampires. For some reason the shadows don't attack, suggesting either some mastery the umbral vampires hold over the shadows or at least a perceived kinship. Ghouls from the Twilight Empire also make frequent trips to the city. Through covert means and interrogation, the shadow fey believe that the Twilight Emperor of the ghouls searches for some lost artifact hidden in the city. Whatever this artifact is, it likely has power over time and might even have been a part of the magic that doomed the city in the first place.

Other, stranger visitors appear in and around the city and its splinters, such as the enigmatic travelers of the eons and Nurian shadow mages who step between past and future as one might cross into the next room. This is hardly surprising given the city's tumultuous relationship with time. Due to the city's unique nature and potent magic, travelers from all realms and times find themselves drawn to it.

Ever Reaching

The other denizens of the Shadow Realm shun the umbral vampires and drive them back with blade and spell whenever their paths cross. As a result, the umbral vampires can't readily make use of shadow roads or even those spots where the branches of the World Tree emerge into Shadow. Though much reduced from their former glory, they remain powerful and devilishly cunning. Perhaps their most disturbing talent is the ability to find weak spots in the barrier between realms. The Shadow reflection of Midgard, where despair, blood, and darkness tear rifts between the worlds, draws the vampires, and their presence seems to hasten the opening of doorways to Shadow. Thankfully, the umbral vampires seem compelled to remain close to the ruins of Oshragora, so they exist in a limited area.

Just as the city seems to warp the land around it, or at least to move in some fashion, so too does it occasionally shed pieces of itself. These splinters of the city, sometimes as little as a single ruined building and other times an entire neighborhood or district, simply appear elsewhere. As with the other distortion effects of the city, a splinter might emerge miles away and remain for days or weeks at a time. The splinters drag umbral vampires and other denizens along with them, with the size of the splinter determining how many creatures follow. A single building might contain one umbral vampire and a host of shadows. A district, on the other hand, might release an onslaught of a dozen or more umbral vampires on the surrounding area.

The bearfolk from the Moonlit Glade have kept a watchful eye on Oshragora after a few disturbing appearances of city splinters within their domain. They grow increasingly worried with each vampire encounter, but don't have enough useful information to plan a suitable defense. So far they've contained the umbral vampires in a dozen splinters until the splinters vanished, but their lack of arcane knowledge hampers their efforts beyond pure reaction. They're quite eager to learn how and why the splinters function and how to keep them at bay.

The most recent addition to those scrutinizing the city includes the fey from the Court of One Million Stars. These strange fey drift through the ruins shrouded in starlight that pains the shadows and umbral vampires. They study the city, but they meticulously avoid the areas of distorted time. Only one such creature has engaged in the briefest exchange while about its task. After obliterating a pack of umbral vampires with an incandescent wave of starfire, the luminous creature whispered to the only surviving adventurer, "the Void calls to the Void, it must not be allowed to answer." The adventurer recounted his story to Revich, the blind angel in the Courts of the Shadow Fey, before hurling himself from the top of the angel's tower.

MOONLIT GLADES

The Moonlit Glades is the most prominent ray of light and hope in the bleak landscape of the Shadow Realm. Here the bearfolk dwell and tend their small patch of home against the corruption of Shadow. While the bearfolk are established enough to be considered natives of the Shadow Realm, they remain as vulnerable to the plane's corruptive influence as any visitor from Midgard. That generations have lived and died within Shadow without falling to its temptation represents a minor miracle.

A proud people, the bearfolk originally hailed from Björnrike the Bear Kingdom in the Northlands of Midgard. The ruler of Björnrike, Mesikämmen the Bear King, foresaw a terrible doom growing in the Shadow Realm that threatened all his people. He gathered his most trusted warriors and druids and charged them with an impossible task—to enter the Shadow Realm and fight back the corruption at its source. His brave subjects set forth on a forbidden shadow road without hesitation and never looked back.

The Moonswept North

The Moonlit Glades nestle deep in a black pine forest of the Shadow Realm's far "north," corresponding closely to the physical location of Björnrike. The moon of Midgard shines its face upon these glades as if blessing the bearfolk in their desperate struggle. Remote even by the ever-shifting standards of the Shadow Realm, the Moonlit

Glades border on the tenebrous reflection of the Nieder Straits to the west. Shadow roads offer the only reliable and timely path of entry into the Glades, and the bearfolk have wrested control of these paths from the shadow fey. Stone and silver cairns mark the borders of the Moonlit Glades, and moonlight always bathes these markers. Bearfolk druids conduct rituals at these stones, renewing the magic that holds Shadow's touch at bay. Each bearfolk settlement similarly features a standing stone or cairn at its center, creating another layer of protection for its residents.

Given their relative safety from the more powerful denizens of the Shadow Realm, the bearfolk have nurtured their claim of the dark land. The Moonlit Glades serve as home to the most numerous pure resources in the Shadow Realm, and the bearfolk fight furiously to maintain them. Waterways in the Moonlit Glades run clear, glittering like rivers of molten silver beneath the moonlit sky. The spirits that haunt rivers and streams in the rest of the Shadow Realm grow quiet and peaceful within the bearfolk's borders, allowing travelers to drink unmolested. The bearfolk tribes maintain a strong druidic tradition, as well as worship of the Green Gods in their masks as Freyr and Freyja. These divine servants spend most of their time tending to the things that grow, producing fruits and vegetables free of shadow corruption. Even the beasts of the Shadow Realm become more like their material counterparts here, and their meat is wholesome and nourishing. Few things rouse the ire of the bearfolk more quickly or more violently than poachers.

Settlements in the Moonlit Glades are small and dispersed, but each remains in close contact with the others. Runners, hunters, druids, and priests make regular rounds between the villages and the capital settlement of Solvheim, carrying news, requests for aid, and generally reinforcing close ties with the surrounding tribes. Originally the population of the Moonlit Glades was purely bearfolk, but over the years it has grown more diverse. Other races from the Kingdom of the Bear have come to the Shadow Realm, initially to maintain contact between the Shadow colony and their kin on Midgard, but eventually many integrated into the existing bearfolk communities. Humans are the most prominent of these newcomer races, but a contingent of reaver dwarves who venerate bear totem spirits found their way here and decided to settle. The dwarves represent an invaluable asset to the Moonlit Glades, since they are among the few seafarers willing to sail on the fog-shrouded black waters of the Shadow Realm's sea. Even these stalwart sailors don't venture far from land, but their crafts allow the bearfolk and their allies unprecedented swift access to other areas of the Shadow Realm when the shadow roads become too dangerous or don't lead to the proper destination. The Rivers Styx and Lethe are far safer for the moonlit reavers to navigate, though, and they occasionally raid shadow fey villages along the waterways.

Some renegade shadow fey call the Moonlit Glades home, although they go to extraordinary lengths to prove their honorable intentions and win the bearfolk's trust. Elfmarked also reside here, as well as a fair number of werebears scattered throughout the population. The Moonlit Glades have a calming effect on werebears, and even during the full moon these lycanthropes find their more destructive urges curbed. Some cursed werebears of Midgard long to discover the way to the Glades so they can live out their lives in righteous service with less fear of losing themselves to the curse.

Ties that Bind

Despite the racial differences among the people populating the Moonlit Glades, they consider each other to be family. A diarchy consisting of the chieftain and the hierophant rules the nation. The chieftain sees to the tasks of martial defense and civil government, serving as the highest authority to settle disputes among tribal leaders. The hierophant represents the spiritual center of the Moonlit Glades and is the most trusted counselor on magical matters, including elevation and ordinance of new druids or clerics, and consultation on matters of shadow corruption.

The current chieftain, Gulfwyr Moonrage, is a massive grizzlehide bearfolk with pitch-black fur frosted with silver. A terrifying opponent in battle, Gulfwyr earns his deed name hundreds of times over, channeling his rage into the destruction of his foes and the protection of the Moonlit Glade. His restraint regarding the werebear curse borders on the stuff of legends, and coupled with the ameliorating effect of the Glades on this strain of lycanthropy, he has never infected another creature. Outside of battle, Gulfwyr is wise and fair, and many already consider him a living ancestor. He brooks no foolishness when deciding disputes and is quick to punish a party bringing frivolous suits to his attention when there is so much at stake. Living in the depths of the Shadow Realm, there is always more at stake.

Ernalda Berlasdottir, the hierophant, functions as the spiritual and magical counterpart to Gulfwyr's battle prowess and civic dictates. A slender but tough purifier bearfolk, she decorates her long, red-gold fur with braids, beads, feathers, and silver charms. The most powerful druid in the Moonlit Glades, she takes great care to learn of any Shadow incursion into the relative purity of her home. She provides the single greatest source of healing and restorative lore in the entire realm; there is no affliction that she can't identify, if not relieve. She devotes her time to maintaining the moonlit wards that protect her home and conferring with other faithful who keep her informed of any cases of shadow corruption. Ernalda wavers between soft-spoken and sharply decisive, as if she isn't totally in sync with events around her. It would be a poor assumption to think her ignorant, however, for her apparent distraction comes from feeling the struggle of light versus shadow and maintaining a constant vigil for any weakness in the light.

A strange sight in the holdings of the Moonlit Glades, a venerable bearfolk with snow-white fur called Elder Whitepaw calls no settlement or village home. Instead,

MOONLIT GLADES

Symbol: A crowned bear rampant with sword and claws

Ruler: Gulfwyr Moonrage, Chief of the Moonlit Glades (CG male bearfolk werebear barbarian 15)

Important Personages: Ernalda Berlasdottir, heirophant (NG female bearfolk); Kordan Wodensson, reaver chieftain (LN male dwarf); Elder Whitepaw (CG male bearfolk)

Population: 20,000 (15,000 bearfolk, 3,000 humans, 1,500 dwarves, 500 elfmarked, 200 shadow fey, 100 werebears)

Capital: Solvheim, population 12,000

Great Gods: Baldur (Lada), Thor, Freyr and Freyja (Yarila and Porevit), Hod (Charun), Wotan

Trade Goods: Medicinal herbs, pure food and water, silver, moonlight honey

he wanders from town to hall. The shaman's demeanor can be strange and sometimes off-putting. He converses at random, answering unheard questions or shifting with no warning or preamble from a discussion with present individuals to one with figments of his imagination or beings otherwise imperceptible to any but himself.

Despite his strange habits and the attendant difficulty in conversing with him, Whitepaw is the only bearfolk other than the chieftain with a direct line of contact to Hierophant Ernalda. Though his wandering seems random, nothing could be further from the truth. Whitepaw is more in tune with the healing and awakening spirits of nature within the cleansed Moonlit Glades than any other being. Elder Whitepaw has a deep, but difficult to communicate or fathom, knowledge of the spread of shadow corruption and the influence of dark entities, such as the umbral vampires. Whitepaw often stumbles into agents of the Lantern Bearers or a visiting band of adventurers from Midgard and provides them with a task or request of great import. Individuals who perform admirably, or who show kindness and compassion to those in need, earn Whitepaw's favor and the goodwill of the bearfolk.

Against the Darkness

When the bearfolk first walked the shadow roads, they had only the faintest idea of what awaited them, or even what foe they sought to thwart. The peril they faced was deceptively minimal at first; the occasional shadow or unquiet spirit, predatory beasts that sought their first taste of uncorrupted flesh. These dangers were faced without difficulty, insulated from the most insidious creatures of shadow by their remote location. All too soon, they learned the true danger of the Shadow Realm remains one's own imperfect nature. Their numbers began to feel the force of corruption, and division struck their ranks. Melancholy gave way to paranoia, which became conflict. As the corruption spread, those who proved more resistant tried in vain to help their fellows, which only added fuel to the fire. Before long, the corrupted bearfolk turned on their own kin, and the blood spilled drew the attention of the umbral vampires. One day they were simply there, arising from dark ruins the bearfolk had never seen before. The warriors fought valiantly, but with their ranks reduced by spreading corruption, they knew they were doomed.

It was then that the druids' last desperate plan succeeded and hope kindled anew. Using the last drops of pure water brought from their home along with silver mined in the Shadow Realm, the druids drove back the darkness empowering the mad invaders. Through this unlikely victory, the bearfolk discovered how shadow corruption coupled with acts of betrayal, murder, and the resulting despair bored holes through the veil between Shadow and Midgard. The umbral vampires slipped through these widening cracks, their strange timeless nature somehow drawing them to places where Shadow bleeds into the world. In the light that shone down from the heavens to banish Shadow, the bearfolk saw the truth that led them to this place and resolved to oppose the spread of Shadow from within. Bolstered by their new discovery, the bearfolk rallied and drove the wretched creatures back into their ruins. These strange slivers of the City Fallen into Shadow melted back into the darkness as moonlight overtook them.

The bearfolk's knowledge brings them into conflict with powerful forces within the Shadow Realm, the Twilight Empire of darakhul and the cursed umbral vampires. Each of these has a terrible knack for finding rifts and cracks to exploit, and the bearfolk know they pose a risk of large-scale shadow corruption pushing into their homeland of Björnrike.

Allies in the Light

The Moonlit Glades form a solid bastion of hope in the Shadow Realm. The nation is protected from shadow corruption and the worst depredations of shadow creatures by its moonlit wards. The bearfolk understand that Shadow is pervasive and claims anything it touches. Bearfolk and their allies are often corrupted by Shadow, but they hold the key to long-term survival. They possess knowledge of a ritual passed down from the first settlers of the Moonlit Glades that can scour shadow corruption with cleansing moonlight.

The druids regularly conduct rituals to maintain the moonlit wards around their borders and in the center of each settlement. Because of their ability to stay Shadow's touch, the Moonlit Glades became the center of the network now known as the Lantern Bearers. Though the bearfolk never teach their purification rituals to outsiders for fear that forces of Shadow will find a way to corrupt or circumvent them, they are willing to use their gifts to aid outsiders struggling against shadow corruption. The relative safety and purity of the Moonlit Glades is recognized throughout the Shadow Realm, and the hidden allies of light know the place may be their only hope in desperate times.

A few far-flung settlements of bearfolk and their allies have been established far from the Moonlit Glades. Each one revolves around a standing stone inlaid with silver or a stone and silver cairn as in the Glades, holding back the Shadow. Usually away from well-traveled areas, these outposts always have a specific purpose. Most often they observe an area where the barrier between the Shadow Realm and Midgard has worn thin. They watch to ensure that incursions from the Shadow Realm can't push through these eroded doorways. These villages and small forts also serve as a sanctuary or last-ditch salvation for friendly travelers lost in the darkness.

Guides from the Moonlit Glades are fascinated by the strange glowing crystals that wander the Shadow Realm—the witchlights. The bearfolk and their ilk aren't entirely sure what to make of these constructs, but they have seen them time and again lead travelers out of danger, and sometimes to exactly what the lost souls need to survive. They don't fully trust the witchlights, however, since they resemble undead will o' wisps. Although there are no confirmed reports of witchlights harming or misleading travelers, there are suspicions enough to warrant healthy caution.

TWILIGHT EMPIRE

To the west of the black wood where the shadow fey dwell lies a great pit in the Shadow Realm's landscape. A series of deep depressions gouge the dark earth, diving deep into thick shadows and darkened tunnels. To a shrewd scholar of Midgard geography this mighty crevasse takes on a sinister meaning, for it exists in the corresponding location of the dwarf heartland, the Ironcrag Cantons. In these Black Iron Depths thrives an exiled arm of the Ghoul Imperium known as the Twilight Empire. These darkness-touched ghouls thrive in the shadow of the Ironcrags, searching for a way to breach the barrier between darkness and light. Their undead bodies absorb the essence of Shadow through the flesh of their meals (shadow fey and other living creatures of the realm), and every ghoul of the Twilight Empire bears the mark of that shadow—their teeth appear pitch black.

Driven out of the Ghoul Empire after a failed coup, renegade ghouls fled deep into the tunnels of Midgard's underworld. Starving and broken in the depths, they chanced upon a shadow road in a lightless cavern filled with twisted abominations. The ensuing battle shed sufficient blood to briefly activate the road, and the commander of the traitor legion led his troops into Shadow.

The road led the ragged ghouls into the shadows cast by the Ironcrag Mountains. They collapsed the tunnel behind them, sealing the shadow road and blocking any pursuers' path. Safe from further reprisals for their treason, they set about building a new empire.

Emperor in Exile

Vilmos Marquering, called the Black Fang, once commanded the Iron Legion in the White City. His coup was well planned and brilliantly executed. He turned key conspirators to his cause, several close to the true emperor, and those he couldn't turn he killed and replaced with loyal cat's-paws. When he struck, Vilmos learned just how deep the emperor's secrets ran and how woefully inadequate all those careful preparations truly were. He barely escaped, and the most powerful warriors of his legion were reduced to dust by the emperor's magic. With what must have been Vardesain's intervention, Vilmos and his surviving allies fled to the Shadow Realm.

The Twilight Emperor now rules from his Black Iron Throne in the heart of the Black Iron Depths. Vilmos reforged the battered remnants of his coup into a fighting force worthy of serving him. To ensure control over his budding empire, the Black Fang anointed his five most trusted lieutenants as his dukes. Each duke assumed command of a city within the Depths and took one of the Twilight legions to defend that stronghold in the Twilight Emperor's name. The Black Fang is wary of even these trusted advisers, for he remembers that betrayal arises from those closest to power. Unknown to any but the Twilight Emperor, the commander of each legion is fanatically loyal to him. Their devotion is enforced through magic, by a black mithral bracer recovered from a strange ruin near the Depths. Should any or all of his dukes turn on him, they'll swiftly find themselves at the points of their own legions' weapons.

Dealings with Darkness

In the years since the ghouls' exile, the Twilight Empire has grown swiftly. They make regular raids on living communities of fey, the Moonlit Glades, and any other breathing creatures they can find. The Twilight ghouls are extremely careful to manage their food sources efficiently, and they rarely suffer a ravenous beggar ghoul to exist among them.

Living in the Shadow Realm means greater difficulty in finding sources of living flesh, so the Twilight ghouls forged peaceful contact with the shadow fey courts. Since the shadow fey control the vast majority of shadow roads, they can arrange passage for ghoul raiding parties to Midgard and ensure their safe return with their precious cargo of "food." In return, the Twilight Emperor assigns legionnaires to assist in the maintenance of shadow roads that pass through particularly dangerous sections of the realm, as well as those known to draw unwanted trespassers from Midgard. The Queen of Night and Magic found the sudden appearance of a ghoul empire intriguing, and amuses herself by keeping tabs on their doings. Lately, she has grown concerned at the increasing ghoul activity in and around the City Fallen into Shadow. Their activities somehow elude her most powerful magic and her canniest spies. She contents herself with the strange magical relics the ghouls unearth through trade and favor for the time being, but that situation won't last long. Her Majesty isn't known for patience once her curiosity is aroused.

Ever since the chance discovery of the Twilight Emperor's magical bracer within a splinter of the City Fallen into Shadow, the Black Fang's ambitions have kindled anew. He hasn't forgotten his humiliating defeat and still dreams of one day striking the White City to claim the throne. The umbral vampires and their city suggest a means that he might use to level the playing field against Emperor Nicoforus. The Black Fang charged his necrophages to learn everything they could about the umbral vampires. The cost has been steep, for gleaning secrets from the vampires has cost ghoul wizards their sanity, but it has been worthwhile. The Twilight Emperor now knows of an artifact orrery hidden deep within the City Fallen into Shadow that can give its wielder mastery over time and space. He currently lacks the forces to strike into the city, so he sends scouting parties to search for signs of the so-called *eye of Veles*.

ZHURAKH, CITY OF BONE AND IRON

The deepest city of the Black Iron Depths, Zhurakh serves as the seat of the Twilight Emperor and the unbeating heart of the empire. The Twilight Emperor learned from his failed coup, and his secret police saturate every level of the city, ever watchful for signs of dissent. For this reason, would-be conspirators tend to avoid the City of Bone and Iron completely.

Nearby, the Endless Falls drain a tributary of the River Styx in a seemingly endless plunge into the black depths of the Shadow Realm. This is the Twilight Emperor's favorite place to deal with traitors and criminals, personally casting them into the depths. The most elite Twilight soldiers, the Blackmaw Legion, stands ready to enforce the emperor's will.

BLACKSTONE

Home to the Twilight Empire's shock troops, the Ravenous Legion, Blackstone broods over one of the few roads into the Black Iron Depths, guarded by the gate fortress Gloomhold. The Warden of Blackstone, Duke Wierdunn Bonehand, scours the populace for ghouls of sufficient strength and viciousness to join the Ravenous Legion. Bonehand and his lieutenants mercilessly hone the legionnaires into fanatic brutes, willing to dive headlong into the jaws of Veles and take a pound of flesh with them as they're devoured.

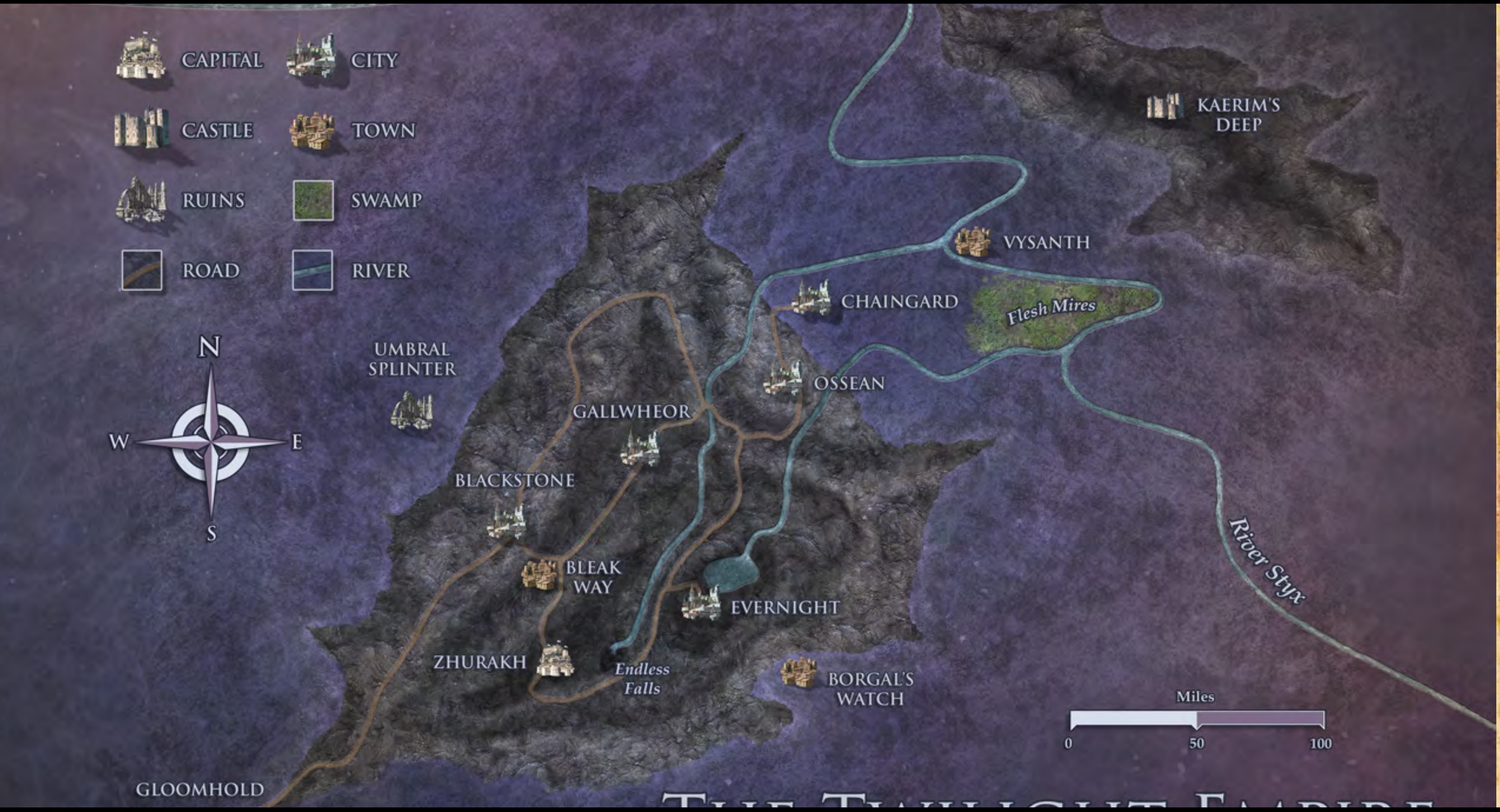
CHAINGARD

The largest settlement on the surface, just on the edge of the Black Iron Depths, Chaingard stands as the foreboding main gateway into the Twilight Empire. This city serves as the receiving point for all slave traffic into the Twilight Empire. Duchess Angvyr Ssetha, the Lady of Chains, oversees the slave supply with meticulous efficiency. She enjoys greeting high-ranking emissaries to the empire, personally welcoming them with a polished and genteel manner. The Shackled Legion guards the walls and gates, directing the flow of slaves with brutal efficiency.

ELDER WHITEPAW'S TASKS

Whitepaw has a number of strange or seemingly unrelated tasks that he offers to those capable of handling such things.

- Whitepaw insists that a cub in a local bearfolk village has gone missing, but upon arriving the cub appears to be present and well. Only deeper investigation reveals subtle inconsistencies in the cub's behavior. She now hates her previously favorite food, she is right-handed whereas she previously favored the left, her friends report strange twists in her imagination during play, and candles and other flames exhaust their fuel twice as quickly in her presence.
- A darakhul that once tried to raid the Glades still lives in a stretch of nearby forest. Whitepaw sends the adventurers to the ghoul as if it were any other merchant or farmer and seems oblivious to any possible danger.
- The elder shows great disdain for any silver nearby individuals use or carry and insists it be thrown away. Shortly thereafter, a curse or disease springs up, traced to the offending silver. The adventurers are tasked with tracking the source of the infection.
- Whitepaw has a powerful craving for Midgard honey and sends the adventurers on an impossible task to find some in the Shadow Realm. When they follow his directions, they find a giant beehive tended by bee folk. In the heart of the hive lies a previously undiscovered portal to the city of Bjeornheim in Midgard, emerging in a giant beehive there.



Evernight

Hewn from the black stone and iron ore of the depths, Evernight sits on the edge of a dark lake. Ruled by Duke Eloghar Vorghesht, high priest of Vardesain, Evernight is the center of faith for the empire. A grand cathedral to the ghoul god dominates the city's center, its black altar stained darker with the blood and flesh of countless sacrifices. The Midnight Legion defends the city, boasting warrior clerics and dark reflections of paladins among its ranks.

Gallwheor

Whereas Blackstone produces terrifying shock troops, Gallwheor provides the finest tactical minds in the Twilight Empire. Duke Borag the Executioner, Warlord of Gallwheor, never lost a battle during his time in the Ghoul Imperium or since their exile into Shadow. The Headsman Legion, known for its deadly efficient strikes to the heart of any opposing force, topples resistance from on high, displaying the heads of enemy commanders to break the ranks of its terrified foes.

Ossean

The first stop after the steep and perilous Clanking Descent from Chaingard down the sheer cliffs of the Black Iron Depths, Ossean receives first pick of any new shipment of slaves. Amid the bone-clad buildings, the Twilight Empire's necrophages labor and study under the direction of Duchess Mikalea Soulreaper, Lorekeeper of Ossean. Her apprentices and loyal necrophages hone their practice and ply the secrets from the flesh and souls of captives, guarded by the Bone Legion's arcane and martial might. Its ranks swell with legionnaires who blend dark arcane magic with the strength of steel.

Midgard Lost

The Shadow Realm ghouls thrive in the Black Iron Depths, but that doesn't mean they are all content. Many harbor deep resentment because of their exile, and they channel that sullen anger in different directions. The cadres of lesser ghouls who blame the Twilight Emperor for his failure and for dragging them into exile don't have the stomach to take direct action against their new empire, but these pockets of resistance are starting to organize. The hidden traitors know the road home is a long one, but they're working to recruit allies of higher station and with greater knowledge who share their discontent. If they can find a legion officer or a necrophage wizard who understands what they've lost, they might discover to return to the Ghoul Imperium.

The loyal Twilight Ghouls, on the other hand, kn that just on the other side of an intangible but near impenetrable barrier waits a nation of flesh and blo unaware of the danger that essentially walks amon These ghouls hunger for dwarf flesh and have turne efforts to finding paths through the veil between Sh and Midgard, seeking to open the floodgates for sl food, and death waiting in the Ironcrag Cantons.

GUIDING LIGHTS

Lights bob in the distance, flitting from shadow to bramble to grove through the dark forests of the fe white glow drifts among the misty swamps, leadin path through the mire that drains the color and the from those it touches. Often mistaken for will o' wi witchlights are tiny shards of faceted crystal, each g with a soft radiance as it drifts through the air. Tho witchlights are constructed creatures, their origins mysterious and the subject of much debate.

Powerful wizards sometimes construct individu witchlights, but that doesn't account for the relativ large number of them roaming the Shadow Realm little glowing constructs seem intelligent, if a bit si They have great control over their level of illumina able to dim their glow to little more than a candle's gleam or flare with a sudden and blinding intensit Some witchlights have invented or have been taug rudimentary code by varying their intensity in qui pulses, but they have no compelling information t regarding their own nature.

Sudden Appearances, Uncertain Motives

The witchlights wander with apparent purpose. Th identify perilous places in Shadow and stay close by make regular stops there as they roam. Some witch keep to themselves, never allowing other creatures come closer than a few hundred feet before they da into the air. Others are drawn to newcomers, racin creatures to light their way. These might follow a tr band for hours or even days before drifting off.

Witchlights can defend themselves. Though dim they can focus their light into searing blasts that sc shadows and scorch flesh, unbalancing a powerful enough to make their escape. If left alone, they can to be beneficial to those that encounter them.

Saviors and Banes

Every traveler in the Shadow Realm eventually run across some hazard, whether a deadly facet of the natural environment or the dangerous creatures that lurk in its depths. Witchlights of a benevolent nature can guide travelers to relative safety.

TWILIGHT EMPIRE

Symbol: White skull topped with green fire on a white field

Ruler: Emperor Vilmos Marquering, the Black Fang (NE male darakhul bard 15)

Important Personages: Kassimir Valengurd the Confessor, Adviser to the Black Iron Throne (NE male darakhul [Necrophage]); Duke Wierdunn Bonehand, Warden of Blackstone (LE male darakhul); Duchess Angvyr Ssetha, the Lady of Chains, Slave Mistress of Chaingard (LE female darakhul); Duke Eloghar Vorghesht, Regent of Evernight (NE male darakhul); Duke Borag the Executioner, Warlord of Gallwheor (NE male darakhul); Duchess Mikalea Soulreaper, Lorekeeper of Ossean (NE female darakhul [Necrophage])

Population: 65,000 (30,000 slaves [bearfolk, elves, humans, goblins, shadow fey], 7,000 darakhul, 10,000 lesser ghouls and ghasts, 6,000 imperial ghouls, 6,000 goblins); the Twilight Imperium has 6,000 active soldiers divided into six legions (lesser ghouls and ghasts make up 90 percent of the army); each city holds one legion in addition to its listed population

Capital: Zhurakh, City of Bone and Iron, population 4,000 (500 darakhul, 3,500 lesser ghouls and ghasts)

Enclaves: Chaingard, population 2,300 (1,200 slaves, 870 lesser ghouls, 200 imperial ghouls, 30 darakhul); Gallwheor, population 900 (600 slaves, 150 lesser ghouls, 100 iron ghouls, 50 darakhul); Blackstone, population 750 (200 slaves, 100 darakhul, 450 lesser ghouls and ghasts); Evernight, population 700 (200 slaves, 350 lesser ghouls and ghasts, 50 priests of Vardesain, 100 darakhul); Ossean, population 600 (400 slaves, 100 lesser ghouls, 50 necrophagi, 50 darakhul sages and scholars)

Great Gods: Vardesain, Anu-Akma, Chernobog, Mavros, Sarastra

Trade Goods: Iron, weapons, armor, relics from the City Fallen into Shadow

Some witchlights possess a darker disposition. This variety of the construct spends much of their time as dim as possible to avoid notice. These dark lights also lurk near perilous places, but with a very different agenda. They brighten their internal light just long enough to attract attention and ensnare a reckless traveler's curiosity. Much like the will o' wisps they're sometimes mistaken for, they lead these incautious travelers to their doom in marshes or over unsafe bridges. Some even wait until a creature in danger is on the verge of rescue and then use their radiant blasts to sever lines or rope bridges at the last second.

Living Illumination

Whatever their true origins, the witchlights appear bound to the school and study of illumination magic. Some witchlights exist as familiars to shadow fey and others who wield the magic of starlight. Such witchlights possess rudimentary communication skills and they have a better chance of developing a more vibrant personality. Shadow fey sorcerers wander the courts with staves or swords set with glowing jewels that aren't jewels at all, but witchlight familiars content to gleam for their masters. The magical light of the little constructs is a form of starlight, so their mere presence aids illumination spellcasters.

This illuminated nature doesn't always work in a witchlight's favor. The creatures most steeped in darkness find witchlights odious and seek to shatter their crystalline bodies and scatter their motes of light. Umbral vampires are particularly vicious and aggressive when it comes to witchlights. Fortunately for the lights, they can usually outrun the immaterial vampires. The ghouls of the Twilight Empire take a grim interest in witchlights, and their spellcasters delight in catching them whenever possible. Their darkest rites can corrupt witchlights, turning them malicious and bloodthirsty. Such fallen witchlights take on spectral colors such as dull red or cold, pale green. The necrophages haven't yet discovered a way to consume the witchlights' essence , but they are patient and diligent. In time, the witchlights' secrets will be revealed.

The Light of Knowledge

A secluded island in the middle of a black lake in the southern Shadow Realm draws witchlights to its shores. The island can be seen from the far side of the lake thanks to the pale glow emanating from the place. Brave souls who survive the trip across the lake, whether by boat or magic, find a building composed of solid light nestled in the center of an otherwise desolate rocky outcropping. Low and wide, the building consists of a central dome and several wings that radiate out from it. Witchlights flit across the lake and into the building, gliding through the walls and ceilings.

Closer examination reveals the walls to be opaque, since their glow obscures vision. For creatures that can't pass through the light walls, an entrance opens to reveal a fantastic site. The structure contains an archive or library, but instead of books and scrolls, planes of multicolored light are stacked atop one another in orderly fashion throughout the sprawling building. Each plane of light contains recorded knowledge. The witchlights move about the archive, a few at a time, to add some of their own light to what's already stored before drifting away again to some far corner of the Shadow Realm.

In addition to the witchlights, library automatons move among the stacks in businesslike fashion. These small, ornate constructs of brass and silver click about on two thin legs, with a long eye stalk that scans the planes of light. Visitors that convince the automatons to help can find strange lore gathered from across the realm and multiverse stored in the archive.

The liosalfar—elementals composed of pure, colored light—are frequent visitors to the archive of light. The liosalfar have a great love of patterns and a hatred of any creature that seeks to disrupt the patterns of "color" the liosalfar identify as the world around them. They can offer invaluable insight on locating a specific piece of lore, but any who threaten the archive or the knowledge stored here inspire their wrath.

COURT OF ONE MILLION STARS

Stars and moon rarely shine directly over the Shadow Realm, but hidden by the gray and black smear of the dreary Shadow sky, stars gleam in all their glory. Above that strange cloud cover rests the most enigmatic of dark fey gatherings, the Court of One Million Stars. Delicate spires of silver and pearl spiral up from great discs spun of dreamstuff and starlight. Clusters of these floating platforms and towers gather together, bound by gracefully arching bridges forged from moonbeams woven with silver. Prince Valendan, a noble selang wizard, rules over the Starry Court with an aloof manner and quiet wisdom. The prince makes it a point to meet every visitor to the court at least once, though few receive a second audience.

The Starry Court

The Starry Court serves as the heart of the Court of One Million Stars. The court consists of a magnificent spire of pearl and silver, spiraling like an immense unicorn's horn from a central building, the court's audience chamber. This seven-sided structure of pearly-white stone features seven gates, one on each of the building's sides that lead into a great hall. Courtiers cluster around the wings of the chamber, with those of increasing station closer to the center. When present, Prince Valendan sits in the precise center, resting upon a tripod seat of silver and silk.

The spire rising toward the stars houses the prince's personal chambers, as well as those of his consorts and the other royal figures of the Starry Court. Balconies dot the outer surface of the spire, allowing a breathtaking view of both the stars and the surface of the Shadow Realm.

A series of magnificent gardens surround the court, home to a wide array of plant life from the Shadow Realm's surface, as well from Midgard. Walkways of crushed pearl trace paths through the central gardens and the seven outer gardens. Floating lanterns shining with pastel light illuminate the walkways, and each outer garden anchors a moonlight bridge leading to another section of the celestial courts. Notably, one of the bridges is blackened and shattered, ending a few yards from where it begins, destroyed long ago by magic of devastating power.

Fey from all walks of life find their way to the Starry Court to further their study of illumination magic, the stars, and celestial movements. Dark pixie scholars can spend decades tracking the movement of a single star, meticulously recording every hint of prophecy in anticipation of a momentous event—the starfall.

When the Stars Walk the World

The stars of Midgard are not just points of light burning i an uncaring sky. They are living things of terrible power a unfathomable knowledge. When momentous events shak the world, a star might deign to leave its bower of black velvet and fall to Midgard or to Shadow. When it lands, it becomes a creature of luminous beauty and impenetrabl mystery. These celestial emissaries appear cloaked and hooded, shrouded in a luminous aura of starlight. They tend to be aloof, and on the rare occasions when they exchange words with a supplicant, understanding isn't guaranteed. The emissaries speak in a strange manner, often reusing terms, but with vastly different contexts an meanings from one part of a statement to the next. Magi such as *tongues* and *comprehend languages* can help but nev provide a perfectly clear meaning.

Even more unsettling, the Starry Courtiers believe that whenever a star falls to the world, it never leaves unaccompanied. Who or what vanishes when the celestial's sojourn ends varies with each visit and isn't always apparent. A starfall is a rare event, but at least one celestial emissary remains as a permanent fixture within the Court of One Million Stars: Cylentha the Silver Mistress. She descended from the heavens nearly 200 years ago and has yet to return home. The specific reason for her extended stay remains clouded, but many believe that she is searching for something. She serves as an adviser to the ruler of the Starry Court, who keeps her counsel quite private. Certain members of the Starry Court would offer a treasure trove of stardust diamonds and prophecies of future glory to understand why the celestial spends so much time at court.

When Cylentha isn't offering advice to the prince, she spends most of her time in a far-flung observatory. This unadorned platform holds no gardens or decorations of any kind. Seven blue-white balls of light, like miniature stars, surround the observatory, which appears as a rounded, curved building surmounted by a dome of iridescent pearl. Inside, the dome allows a perfect view of any star, every far-flung celestial cloud or nebula, and even into the blackest reaches of the utterdark, perhaps even offering a glimpse into the Void.

Court of One Million Stars

Symbol: A glittering field of stars

Ruler: Prince Valendan, Speaker of the Sky (N male selang wizard 18 [illuminator, see *Deep Magic*])

Important Personages: Phaerliggath (CN male adult void dragon); Cylentha the Silver Mistress (N celestial emissary [fallen star]); Verskas Bright Eye (CN male sprite)

Population: The full population of the entire court is unknown (selang, shadow fey, witchlights, and various assorted fey dwell in the floating spires of silver and moonlight)

Capital: Starry Court, population 13,200 (7,000 assorted fey, 6,000 selang, 150 celestial emissaries, 50 shadow fey ambassadors)

Great Gods: Veles, Khors, Wotan, Sarastra

Trade Goods: Void secrets, cartography, illumination magic, prophecy

Whispers from the Void

The Starry Court reaches toward the stars, but that necessitates drawing close to the cold, vast emptiness between the heavenly lights. In that endless nothing, ancient things stir and whisper their secrets. A careless or foolish investigator can tap into those whispers and glean

The Void seeks to spread its influence like Shadow, but it has a more difficult time finding purchase in the world. Despite the Void's destructive influence, Prince Valendan hasn't forbidden study of its magic yet, though he takes an interest in anyone who seeks it.

One of the more recent and momentous visitors to the Court of One Million Stars, the void dragon called Phaerliggath, appears as a creature from the cold dark beyond the coils of Veles. This hoary old wyrm has long drifted among the utterdark, and like all of his ilk, he has seen far too much of it. The dragon's mind has frayed. Phaerliggath claimed an entire spire of the Starry Court when it arrived, and it rarely emerges from its commandeered lair. The spire, once magnificent, now crumbles and falls into decay as it goes by the new name of Voidreach. Phaerliggath entertains visitors from time to time, but the only guests who return are those captivated by the Void. Phaerliggath seems disturbingly willing to share the forbidden secrets of Void magic with those brave or unhinged enough to seek him out.

Lady Cylentha makes occasional visits to the void dragon's tower, and she investigates anyone else who speaks with the dragon. She is always polite in her way during such inquiries, but her manner suggests she won't take no as an answer to her questions. The Silver Mistress has recently been leaving the courts and taking to the surface between her visits to the void dragon and the prince. The only words she's ever spoken publicly regarding her wanderings are maddeningly unhelpful: "The Void calls to the Void. It must not be allowed to answer."

The Spiral-Downs

While enclaves of the Court of One Million Stars dot the skies above the Shadow Realm, the largest concentration of Starry Courtiers live in a large complex of spires known as the Spiral-Downs. Connected to the Starry Court by a moon bridge, the Spiral-Downs consists of a series of interconnected platforms that hang in the sky. The platforms join one to the next by a series of moonlight bridge staircases, forming a spiral of ascending status and power. The lowest and largest platform houses the largest residential spires. It's the least well adorned, and courtiers of the lowest station reside here. Each ascending platform is slightly smaller, more ornate, and has fewer residents than the platform below it. The residences spiral upward to the loftiest platform that boasts verdant gardens, ethereal music, delicate spires spun of starlight and dreams, and the elite of the Starry Court.

Rising Above

Attaining access to the Court of One Million Stars is no easy task. Unseen paths lead between the surface and the Starry Courts, paths nearly impossible to decipher without an invitation or a guide. Occasionally one of the enigmatic witchlights chooses to lead a pilgrim from Shadow up to the stars, following a trail of glittering illumination that somehow remains solid as they climb.

Shadow fey illumination wizards speak in hushed tones of star-bridges that appear only in certain locations of the Shadow Realm and only during certain sidereal alignments. Rare glimpses of the stars through the gloomy Shadow sky can offer an illuminated mind enough insight to calculate where and when such a bridge will open next.

Each path to the Court of One Million Stars ends at a gate house, where warriors of the court guard against hostile incursions from the surface. The most formidable of these, Vigil, stands unblinking watch over the only path leading from the surface to the Starry Court. Vigil appears as a hovering disc of tightly fitted tiles. A gate of spun silver, seemingly delicate but nearly indestructible, bars both the entrance from the surface and the bridge to the Starry Court. Twisted spires like horns defend the disc's edge, and a bronze dome in the center provides shelter for the gate wardens. The gate wardens, the fiercest warriors among the court, closely vet any newcomers on the path for possible threats to the Starry Court and the prince.

THE ENDLESS HUNGER

In the depths of the Shadow Realm lurks one of its darkest, best-kept secrets. Beyond the grasp of death, bound to eternal hunger, the most ancient of all cave dragons schemes and plots in the darkness. ng gone like all cave dragons of sufficient age, clings to existence. This ancient horror sought out great wizards of the Ghoul Imperium and burrowed into forgotten dungeons beneath the earth in search of salvation. On the brink of death, it found its answer. Vizorakh cast its soul into an onyx gemstone the size of an elephant and passed into undeath. It rose again as a dracolich, no longer hungering for flesh but for the souls of its own kind. The gaunt undead cave dragon, its scaled flesh pulled tight against its skeleton, is horrible to behold. Green corposant flickers around the blank scales where its eyes should be, and a second, hissing tone underscores its booming voice.

Despite its immortality, the ancient cave dragon remains restless. Its first priority is always to feed its phylactery to gain a momentary respite from the soul-hunger gnawing at it, and it spends enough time every year or every decade slipping back into Midgard's underworld tunnels to hunt down and consume at least one other cave dragon—the older the better. Once Vizorakh's phylactery is sated, the dragon turns its attention to other amusements.

Pawns and Deception

Vizorakh's motivations seem impossible to fathom, but it meddles constantly in the affairs of the sentient denizens of the Shadow Realm. It takes the form of a shadow fey or darakhul to mingle among those races undetected to sow chaos. It makes alliances with great care but either with no intention of honoring promises made or the direct intention of double-crossing its would-be allies. Whatever ends drive these bizarre machinations, the dragon plans its moves at least decades in advance, if not centuries.

Vizorakh moves and exists in a labyrinthine network of tunnels and caverns. The darakhul are the only other creatures to make extensive use of these passages, but even they stay confined to the area within and immediately surrounding the Black Iron Depths. Vizorakh can travel at a terrifying pace to any corner of the Shadow Realm, and often from there to the underworld of Midgard.

Hunger within Hunger

Vizorakh knows of the Twilight Emperor's obsession with the City Fallen into Shadow and his intensifying search for lost artifacts. The dracolich insinuates itself into darakhul legion patrols and scouting excursions into the City as they search for signs of the *eye of Veles*. Whether Vizorakh wants the eye as part of its own schemes or simply seeks an opportunity remains unclear. The darakhul excursions it joins rarely return to the Black Iron Depths. Vizorakh has no qualms about dying in darakhul form since it will reform in its lair from one of the innumerable cave dragon skeletons surrounding its phylactery.

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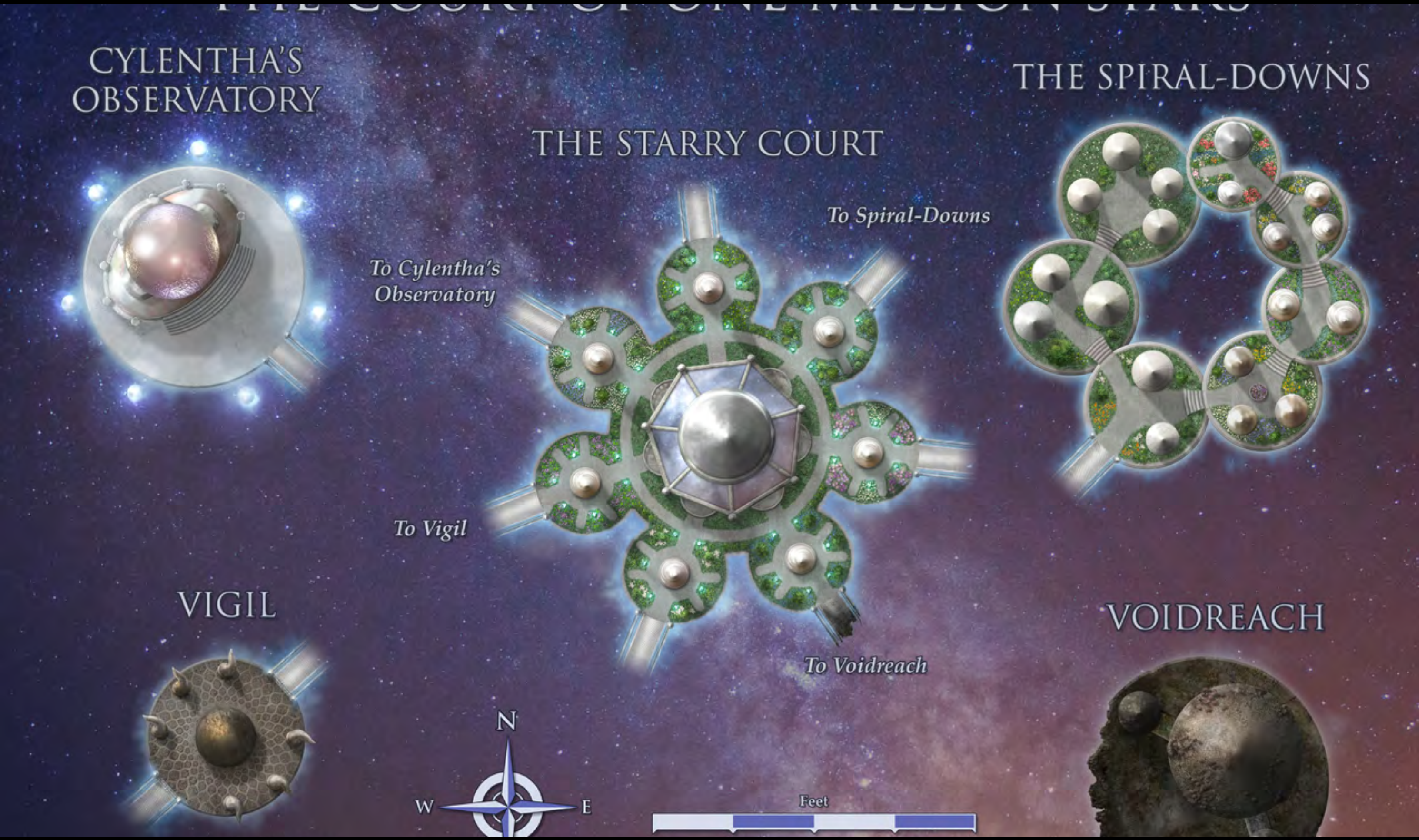

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Fey, but there it treads lightly. Even the mighty and insane Vizorakh respects the power of the Queen of Night and Magic and the Moonlit King. Of all the denizens of the Shadow Realm, the rulers of the Courts Invisible have the knowledge, influence, and power to root it out and destroy it. For that reason, Vizorakh's schemes rarely involve disrupting the greater workings of the shadow fey, but that hardly means it doesn't meddle.

Canny enough to pass as a shadow fey in word and deed, Vizorakh can easily insinuate itself into the Lower Court or as a servant. Even that limited contact provides it with access to whispered secrets and the opportunity to nudge individuals and events in directions beneficial to its mad plans. Of particular interest is the presence of a demon lord, Akyishigal, Lord of Cockroaches, within the Courts of the Shadow Fey. That dark figure chafes and stews about its current circumstances, and that unrest could be the crack in which Vizorakh's influence takes root.

THE HIDDEN TRUTH OF VOIDREACH

Phaerliggath is a mighty dragon, strong enough to lay claim to Voidreach uncontested by the Starry Court, but the origins of Voidreach's corruption go further back to a creature even more potent. Voidreach is the nexus to a pocket of the Void, a place claimed by an ancient void dragon that vanished so long ago that none remember its name. Phaerliggath discovered the means to access the ancient void dragon's hidden lair, and much of its power comes from the forbidden knowledge and lost magic hidden in that cache.

As powerful as Phaerliggath is, he's a squatter. A creature far older and more potent may one day return home to find an upstart wyrm and lowly fey vermin infesting its lair. On that day, the wrath of the stars and

[redacted]

PANTHEON

12

The gods of Midgard have a rich and strange history. Slippery and demanding, they are much more than voices that answer pleas for healing, blessings, protection, and gentle repose.

The gods have their own goals. They have their own needs. Most of all, they play a game among their own kind, a game of power and deception—because gods, having once been made, can also be unmade.

POWER GRANTED, POWER STOLEN

The story begins in the times of the Great Bridge Bifrost and the World Tree Yggdrasil, when the serpent Ouroboros first created and encircled the realms of mortals. In those early days, there were no gods. The elves, the giants, and other ancient races walked the earth, the valkyries soared above it, and the dwarves did not yet exist. Mortals fought for survival, invented the spear and gained the gift of fire, and they pondered the nature of the world. Those who could speak to the dead were the closest thing to priests, the shamans and druids who mastered soul magic.

First Gods

The Northern gods were once humans and elves, the early druids. One of these priests struck down a dragon and bathed in its blood, and learned secrets of power. Imbued with the force of 100 ley lines, Wotan climbed the World Tree and grasped the secrets of the runes. With the help of his fellow priests he became divine, and together they built Valhalla and ruled all the world.

These first gods demanded worship. They demanded sacrifices in blood and treasure, and they wanted loyalty from lesser creatures. The first gods were suspicious of those who sought to know them too well and asked too much, for the gods knew that anyone might drink from the wellsprings of power, so they guarded them jealously. Some say the wellsprings are the 30 heart scales of the World Serpent. Some say they are the flames that burn in Valhalla, stoked by wood of the World Tree.

Some say that the wellsprings of the gods are older gods and titans, chained and shackled world spirits who gave their strength to those new gods and who still live in bitter darkness somewhere in a hidden prison.

Many gods and goddesses walk the branches of the World Tree. Their true power is often kept hidden, for the greatest enemies of the gods are their own kind.

FIRST SHACKLES AND BETRAYALS

Indeed, the gods did fight and enslave one another: Loki betrayed the early gods, granting power to a lover in the South, the purring and deceitful Bastet, who became the goddess of cats and perfume. Loki befriended the thursir and Jotun giants, and they taught him lore to make the fire god nearly as strong as Wotan and his runes.

Other gods rose by striking down weaker gods, demigods, and nature spirits.

The stories and slanders run together, each god accusing the others of murder, rape, cannibalism, and theft of divine power and prestige. In the end, jealous Aten killed a dozen of the Southern gods, Ra first of all, then Isis and Nut and Ptah . With each death, he grew stronger—though some dead gods have returned centuries or even millennia later. In time, Thoth-Hermes and Wotan and even mighty Veles grew fearful of what might come: the plethora of gods shrinking to a few survivors, and all others slain or enslaved.

THE END OF GOD-SLAUGHTER

Veles spoke the Words of Peace, which compelled the gods to no longer make war openly, and induced them to wear masks, that they might not know one another. The Great Serpent warned Aten that the sun need no longer shine [redacted] gods did not end. And so the open war of god against god evolved into a quieter struggle, so as not to rouse the Great Serpent to further action.

Yet some say Aten and Khors both bargain for the power of the Chained Goddess Mnemosyne, so perhaps the old dark ways are not entirely gone. Now oracles, heroes, and demigods fight on the gods' behalf, and the gods meddle in mortal affairs more than ever. For if the gods cannot hold the sword that slays their rivals in their own hands, they can give their favored weapon to their priest-heroes, and take satisfaction in their great deeds.

FIRST MASKS AND THEIR USES

All this mayhem explains why so many things about the gods remain a mystery. Their names are various and shifting. They wear masks, the better to show themselves as they prefer to be seen and to avoid being replaced entirely. Sages of the divine order claim that only 30 true gods can exist at any time, and only five within any great city, six in a great kingdom. More than this and some fall into the ranks of the demons and angels—still powerful but no longer able to rise to the heavens or rule in the Eleven Hells. Those who fall from the divine ranks into the realms of demons and devils will do anything to regain their lost standing. Their most common ploys involve much more than animal blood sacrifices—they demand the sacrifice of their followers' souls and children. These are the dark gods, full of promises, bringing terror to the righteous.

Why so few true gods, and why so many masks? No one is sure. Despite entreaties and the investigations of generations of mortals, the gods of Midgard keep their secrets close. They are a changing family of alliances and betrayals, who regard humans and other mortals as useful tools. All the gods hold tightly to the secrets of how they came to godhood, and they cling to their divinity with all the strength they have—for even gods fade, wither, and die. The gods of Midgard are friendless and yet the greatest allies of mortals, as well as their greatest foes and betrayers. But above all other concerns, they are turned to face one another, and to most of them the voices of mortals are faint. Their wars and loves are among their own kind.

All mortals should know this and be wise before they choose to walk the path of the priest and the petitioner.

HOW GODS USE MASKS

Behind the names and temples lies a secret of the gods' creation: gods are not individuals in Midgard but archetypes or instantiations of universal forces. They aren't people in the same sense as a mortal individual; rather, they arise from the strength of their priests and their place in the cosmos, and the same god can look and act entirely differently in different places. The beliefs of their followers vary from place to place. Many gods of Midgard go by multiple names, have variant domains or local titles, and even switch gender and appearance.

[redacted]

Divine masks help inject uncertainty and the sense of a great realm into the setting's religion. While the cut-and-dried, god A matches portfolio A style of gaming is convenient for players looking to min-max their cleric, it's absolute death for any sense of mystery and doubt in divine acts. If the gods are too easy to understand, it detracts from their role as larger-than-life creatures of wonder and awe. If a god can be both Hermes and Thoth at the same time, and if a divinity can contradict itself because it is beyond mortal understanding, so much the better.

Some GMs might find this ambiguity difficult or uncomfortable, or not worth the trouble. For others, it's the thing that makes the Midgard gods more interesting than saying "pick any two domains and give them a name and choose a symbol."

Gods need to be mysteries, especially from their followers, because otherwise there's never a sense of a divine journey or greater purpose, and clerics might as well be wizards who can heal. The perception of gods as unknowable makes them objects of fascination and curiosity. The inability to fully comprehend a divine force makes it, strangely, more appealing.

[redacted]

As a result, the gods of Midgard are unknowable and mysterious, and their faiths embody shifting channels of power. Their forms are variable and protean. Stranger still, only a few gods at a time hold sway in any city or region. Savants believe there might only be room for five or six gods per city, and perhaps only three in a town, and one in for a village. Shrines to more than a small number of divinities rarely prosper. But the human heart has room for many gods. In Midgard, faith is not a matter of choosing a single god but choosing the right god for a particular need or occasion.

The gods of Midgard are involved in the world, speaking to their priests through oracles and visions. They are also largely disassociated from mortals because they rarely explain themselves, and their divine concerns seem unrelated to mundane or mortal troubles.

The gods seem eager to hide their true identity from worshippers and sometimes pretend to be other gods entirely. This deception is common: Wotan might also be Horus, and Khors might also be Aten as well, and any fool can see that Perun, Mavros, and Thor are clearly brothers if not entirely the same divine wellspring with slightly different avatars.

VALUE OF CONFUSION

Why are the gods eager to disguise their identities? Philosophers discuss three possible reasons, and divine heralds and messengers offer variants to their priesthoods.

First, adopting new names and slightly different avatars helps the gods steal their way into new regions and absorb new followers. In this way, the gods of Midgard can be worshipped under several names and avoid the difficulty of overcoming regional or racial hostility and prejudice. Surely Ariadne is happy to have worshippers calling out to her as Rava as long as her divine goals are met.

Second, it provides a form of insurance against the decline of any region or nation. If a rampaging horde from the east burns all the temples of Perun yet the fanes of Thor remain untouched in the North, then the Thunder God still retains a measure of his worship and power.

Third, the gods use avatars and masks for purposes of their own, and they want to retain some degree of deniability. This is why the exact relationships of the various masks remain in doubt. They might use masks to assassinate a god "behind the scenes" and take over his temples and worshippers wholesale, for instance. The deceased god's worshippers still pray to a divinity and receive boons and spells, even if, over time, the god's demands shift to reflect the goals of the god who effectively took the faith from a prior divine being of a different character.

NEW DOMAINS

Gods and goddesses of Midgard command divine forces not seen in other realms, or at least not in exactly the same way. These forces wax and wane, and some priests hold the skeins of this divine net more tightly than others.

See the *Midgard Heroes Handbook* for full details of these domains and their associated divine powers: Apocalypse, Beer, Cat, Clockwork, Darkness, Dragon, Hunger, Hunting, Justice, Labyrinth, Moon, Mountain, Ocean, Prophecy, Speed, Travel, and Void. See Appendix for the Lust domain.

The use of these domains is entirely up to the GM and players, but they provide both variety and depth to the existing list. The alignment domains are entirely optional in the Midgard campaign setting.

HOW TO READ THE PANTHEON DETAILS

Each god in a pantheon has a description of the same type, starting with the name and titles and moving on to mechanics and setting information.

DIVINE DOMAIN: The divine domains that clerics can choose from. The domains are further described in the *Midgard Heroes Handbook*.

ALIGNMENT: Most gods of Midgard have just one alignment element.

FAVORED WEAPON: Priests of the god may use any of the weapons listed here.

DEMIGODS OF MIDGARD

Stories abound of the children of the gods. The product of the union between the divine and mortals, these children are sometimes gods in their own right but more frequently are born as demigods. Carrying a godspark from their divine parent, demigods are considered to be legendary creatures and have special legendary actions. Demigods gain 3 actions per round that must be used one at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. A demigod regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Though each demigod is different, most have the following actions:

- **LEGENDARY STRIKE**: The demigod makes one attack.
- **LEGENDARY RESISTANCE (COSTS 2 ACTIONS)**: If the demigod fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.
- **LEGENDARY HEALING (COSTS 3 ACTIONS)**: The demigod magically regains 20 (4d8+4) hit points.

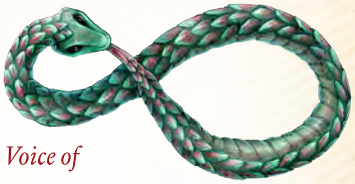
The setting information that follows includes a physical description and background, plus typical worshippers, symbols, sacred books, famous shrines, priests, and more. It also includes a section of the god's common masks and divine allies and enemies.

Most important to PCs is the last item: "What the God Demands." This is the creed and worldview of that god; failure to follow it means that a cleric or other divine caster will no longer be granted spells, and devout followers who fail to follow the creed will lose favor with religious hierarchies.

THE GREAT SERPENT

Midgard is surrounded by a god made flesh, the great World Serpent, a monstrous beast that defines the edge of the world and that contains—and some say, created—the entire world. This serpent, biting its own tail, creating the tides through his breathing and storms through his snorting and sneezes, is well known to the Northlanders and the Mharoti and less well known in other places. Hugely powerful, he is an indolent, even lazy, god who rarely speaks to his worshippers. Prophecies say that someday he shall consume the earth entirely.
He is a creature of the end of all things, and his worshippers are few.

Veles (Ouroboros or Jörmungandr)



God of the Earth and Waters, Creator of Midgard, Father of Serpents, Lord of Oceans, Emperor of Earthquakes, Patron of Giants and Dragons, Voice of Distant Stars

Divine Domains : Apocalypse, Dragon, Hunger, Nature, Ocean, Prophecy

Alignment: Neutral

Favored Weapons: Bite, spear, and battle axe

Called Veles in the East and South, Jörmungandr in the North, Dyjj in the Southlands, and Ouroboros in the Crossroads and the West, the Great Serpent is the embodiment of worldly things, strength and rage, wisdom and water, earth and blood and death. The Serpent is entirely unconcerned with an

afterlife, but instead focused on the natural world and its various scaly and non-scaly children. Some claim he is one of Loki's children, but this is likely another one of Loki's tall tales.

Sailors who claim to have seen the flanks of Ouroboros describe the god as a wall of mossy, scaly flesh encircling the oceans. Beyond his bulk lies the Void filled with stars and darkness.

Worshippers

Giants and dragons are the primary followers of the World Serpent, though some dwarves, humans, and kobolds also acknowledge him.

Ouroboros is a reminder of the short lives and paltry significance of most mortal lives. As a result, few care to worship the Great Serpent. Most of his followers are dour stoics or frenzied believers who live life to the fullest, since the afterlife is uncertain at best. Certain druid cults follow the Serpent of Wisdom, and cults devoted to the Void and outer darkness claim a dark and apocalyptic version of the Great Serpent as their patron.

Symbols and Books

Some believe that Veles taught the Northern and Southern tongues to the giants and the dragons, respectively. If any original books of his teachings survive, they are rare and known only to a few. Whispers claim that one such volume exists, called the Forked-Tongue Prophecies or sometimes the Circled Tongue. It is said to grant power over serpents, drakes, and dragons, and to foretell the end of all things.

Ouroboros's symbol is a snake biting its own tail.

Shrines and Priests

Veles has few great shrines and famous priests, though many caves serve as his holy sites, especially those containing streams or springs. Some dragons and giants claim the title of high priest, but Ouroboros seems not to care. The Portal of the Void in Harkesh claims the honor of the god's most prominent shrine. Its high priest, Yavuz al-Prezhan, is one of the few who performs rites specifically to honor Veles. Dragons seem keen on these rites, which involve kobold and dragonkin sacrifices.

A less prominent but nevertheless important shrine to Veles stands in the Grand Duchy of Dornig, at Bad Solitz in the private sanctuary of the vann Rottsten family at the Tourmaline Palace. Cleric Hudricus Orovan is called the Keeper of the Keys, after the Keys of Veles that are said to open all roads and portals.

Masks

Priests of Ouroboros claim all other gods are his masks. More plausibly, the eastern dragon gods might all be faces or avatars of Ouroboros. A few Northlanders believe that Veles is nothing more than a mask of Loki, and part of a tremendous plot with the giants.

Other Faiths

Ouroboros is largely disinterested in other faiths, and they likewise ignore the Serpent Father. The great exception is Thor and his mask or brother Perun, both mortal enemies of the Great Serpent. The dragon gods acknowledge Veles but do little to aid or hinder him. Some prophecies of the Dragon Empire explicitly call on the authority of "the Five Dragon Gods," while others refer only to "the Four Great Patron Gods of the Empire."

What Ouroboros Demands

Your time is short, and all things end. Make your mark on the world, show mercy or cruelty, but prepare yourself for the end of all things. Ensure that the ley lines run smooth, that magic remains strong, and the world will live longer. If you corrupt the ley lines and walk with dark gods, you hasten the hour of apocalypse.

NORTHERN GODS

The stern gods of the Northlands are forbidding, bloody, grim, and dangerous—to outsiders. Northern humans, dwarves, and shapeshifters take joy in the delights of gods that call them to excellence, that invite great boasts and greater deeds, and that laugh louder than thunder.

Piety in the Northlands is a curious thing. Although the gods have their share of true believers, most people regard the gods as unruly kings rather than divine beings: powerful and dangerous if crossed, helpful when bribed or flattered, and thankfully easy to appease with tribute.

Blood is the usual sacrifice. Goats, cattle, or horses suffice most of the time, but it's not uncommon for humans, dwarves, or trollkin to go beneath the knife when dire portents and evil occurrences demand a response. Each god prefers offerings delivered in a particular way: Wotan demands sacrifices are hung and pierced by spears while Baldur's offerings are burned and Thor prefers heads bashed in with a sacred hammer.

Druids and even witches are common classes for priests. Full-time clerics in the southern style are a relative rarity, treated more as favored champions than clergy. Most priests also pursue another role, from jarl or captain to soothsayer, hunter, or smith. Worship isn't something to be kept separate from everyday life; it takes place in feasting halls and forges, on battlefields and the swaying decks of longships. The North hosts few dedicated temples not because Northlanders are impious but because they

TABLE 1–12: MAJOR GODS OF THE NORTH

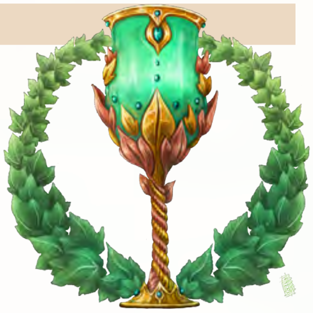
Name	Typical Worshippers
Baldur (Lada)*	Lovers, families, bards
Freyr and Freyja	Druids, farmers, bearfolk
Loki	Monsters, scoundrels
Sif	Women warriors, archers
Thor	Warriors, adventurers
Wotan	Kings, jarls, wizards

* See Baldur (as Lada) under "Crossroads Gods" below.

consider it fruitless to try to contain their gods. They've better things to do than visit you, so it's best to call on them in the places where they like to walk.

Few Northlanders devote themselves to a single deity. Most acknowledge all gods as powerful and best not angered. Although most people have a deity or two that's close to their heart, it's not uncommon for Northlanders to call upon local gods when traveling, abandoning them with equal casualness when they move on.

Freyr and Freyja



Twin Gods of Passion, Fertility, Magic, and the Living World, Lord and Lady of the Vanir, Gods of Beauty, Patron of Farmers and Patroness of Shield Maidens, the Twins of Wine

Freyr Divine Domains: Life, Nature

Freyja Divine Domains: Tempest, V

Alignment: Good

Favored Weapon: Sickle (Freyr), bast

Freyr and Freyja are twins, children of t now dwell among the Aesir. Technically exchanged after the Vanir War, they're r part of the family and sit in the highest c Asgard. They taught the gods witchcraft divine sponsors of Njord the Sea Maste

Freyr and Freyja are gods of the old el religion that has adapted better than mo to the new ways. Freyr bestows peace ar pleasure on mortals, a protector of farm and a foe to fire giants and flames that destroy farmsteads and fields. Freyja is a skilled witch, so beautiful she cries gold tears. She wears the necklace of the Brisings, an unmatched piece of jewelry she purchased at great cost. Freyja is also the patron of shield maidens. Both adventurous deities have seen their share of battles.

Like Wotan, they gather fallen warriors to form an army with which the Vanir will fight beside the Aesir at Ragnarok.

Worshippers

Elves, the elfmarked, farmers, and hunters are all followers of Freyr and Freyja. The twin gods are wildly popular in the Northlands, the Grand Duchy of Dornig, and in the Arbonesse.

Symbols and Books

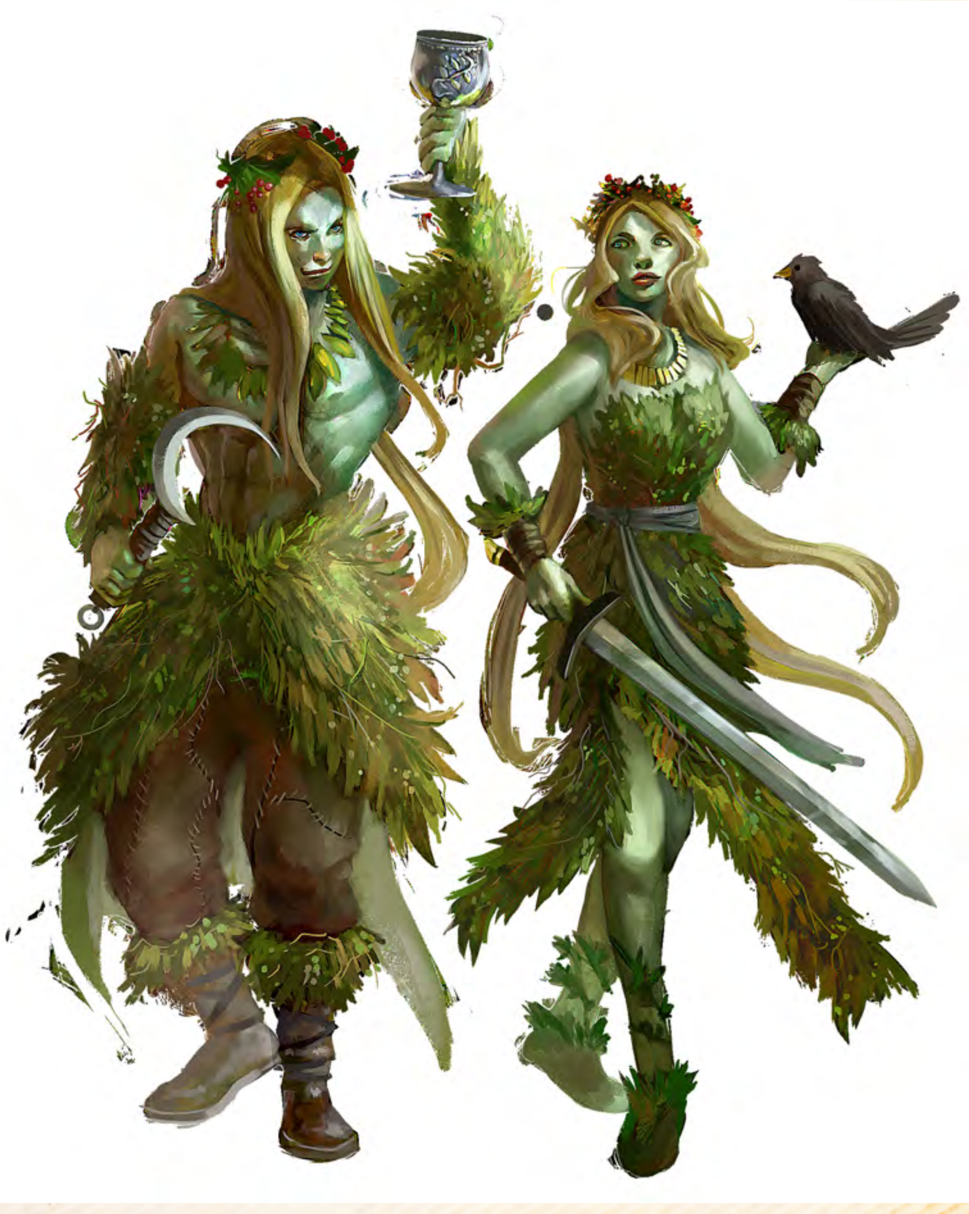
The sacred books of Freyr and Freyja are all written in Elvish or the Northern Tongue. One is called the Coming of the Green Gods, the other is Wisdom of the Vanir.

Shrines and Priests

The North supports hundreds of shrines to the twin gods, deep in forest clearings or in shallow caverns, especially those containing springs or rivers. The largest stone temple of the faith is in the town of Bjeornheim, the Temple of the Hive and Flower. This sweet-smelling temple's priests include a few bearfolk as well as humans.

Masks

Freyr and Freyja are widely held to be masks of Yarila and Porevit, or vice versa. Yarila and Porevit are considered the elven faces of the gods, and Freyr and Freyja the more human ones. In the South, they are called Nun and Naunet, and among the centaurs they are the Twins of Wine.



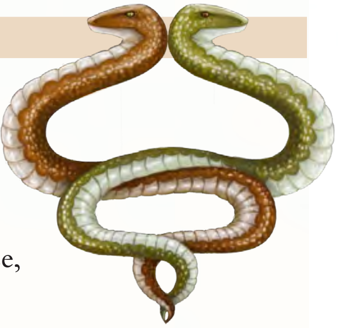
Other Faiths

Freyr and Freyja fiercely oppose Boreas, the White Goddess, and Loki, and ally with the Goat of the Woods, Nethus, and Ninkash. They are rivals of Sarastra, though the two faiths are competitive rather than hostile.

What Freyr and Freyja Demand

The twin gods are worshipped together but both demand equal due from their followers. Worshippers must revere the old ways, respecting the power of nature and the fey and elementals bound to it—new things are distrusted or destroyed. Their chosen offerings include the bounty of nature as well as drunken debaucheries. Freyr and Freyja demand their worshippers punish those who scorn the old ways with curses.

Loki the Trickster



Shapeshifting God of Cunning, Mischief and Malice, Lord of Deception, Patron of Thieves, Father of Fenris, Hel, and Jörmungandr

Divine Domains: Apocalypse, Knowledge, Travel, Trickery

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapon: Net

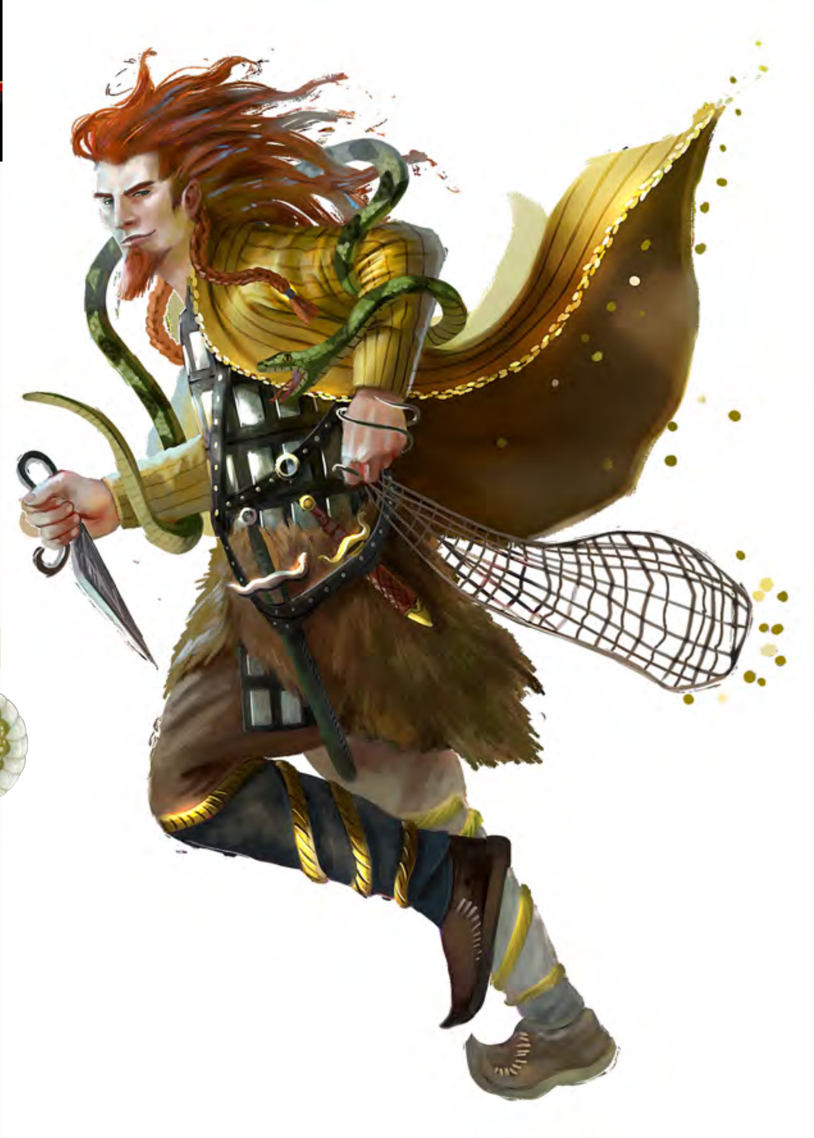
What's known and rumored about Loki is surely only the tip of the iceberg compared to what's hidden behind misdirection and lies. You'll never hear the same story of his origin twice, and that's the way he likes it. Loki is a trickster and an instigator. He brings change—often dangerous change—but also helps the gods escape the trouble he causes. In a world dominated by the strong and forthright, he embodies the talents that Northlanders overlook: cleverness, stealth, and guile.

Many liken Loki to a fire—useful, bright, and alluring but also unpredictable, uncontrollable, and potentially deadly. Like a flame he can suddenly shift from small and harmless to large and dangerous. He's a renowned shapeshifter even among the gods and has sired numerous monsters, including the wolf Fenris, his half-dead daughter Hel, and (allegedly) the World Serpent.

Loki's fate is a dark one. Driven by jealousy, he will kill Baldur and his monstrous children will bring about the twilight of the gods. These deeds might be in the future, but they cannot be forgiven or forgotten, even before they have come to pass. Some say the suspicion of the gods and the scorn of mortals will drive him from mischief to evil, whereas others claim that Loki was wickedness incarnate from the start. The truth—like so much more about him—will probably never be known.

Worshippers

Clever warriors and cooks, mischief-makers and the wise, all sorts worship Loki and thank him for the gift of fire and knowledge . . . but all know his dark side as well.



worshipped by those who consort with monsters and those about to commit acts of treachery or cunning. Few dare to call upon him, since his divine "help" causes more trouble than it solves.

Symbols and Books

Loki's symbol is twin serpents, or sometimes an open net. His priests keep no books; they pass along his faith through the spoken word.

Shrines and Priests

Loki has almost no temples, though in a sense he has thousands, since some might worship him at every fire. His greatest priest Magnate Avgustos Sigismor (CN male human cleric 11 [Loki]), a noble of Krakova, is widely believed to have been slain by Princess Hristina of the darakhul, though a few claim that he has instead become a darakhul or otherwise cheated death. Priests of Loki hide among the dwarves, gnomes, and elsewhere—currently, two of his strongest advocates are dwarven brothers in Wolfheim.

Masks

Loki is called Hermes in the Seven Cities, and Kwanzi in the Southlands, and some in the north call him Kvasir. Other stories claim he is a mask of Sarastra or Chernobog, or even Baal or Veles.

Other Faiths

Loki is blood-brother of Wotan and a common companion to Thor, and the jester of the gods. They are family, and often allies. Yet he continually provokes the Aesir and finds himself unwelcome in Valhalla—at least until his cunning is needed once more. His primary friends are often disreputable gods: Boreas, the Hunter, Chernobog, and Sarastra consort with him and sometimes aid his plots. Sif, Baldur, and Freyr and Freya all have a distinctly antagonistic view of Loki, and the feeling is mutual.

What Loki Demands

Loki has few temples and his name is more often a curse than a prayer. The trickster demands nothing from his followers: "Do what you think would amuse me" is all the guidance he gives, inspiring japes and trickery as well as fires and foolishness. His worshippers have learned to serve him while maintaining an outwardly respectable demeanor. They aim to place themselves in the same position among mortals that Loki holds am
gods—renowned for skill and cleverness rat
strength, sometimes unwanted but always i

Sif

The Sword Maiden, Goddess of Family and Marriage, Mistress of Valkyries, Wife to Thor, Patron of Women Warriors and Archers, Patron of Huldramose

Divine Domains: Beer, Hunting, Speed

Alignment: Good

Favored Weapon: Bow

Sif is the gold-keeping, arrow-shooting, ale-brewing wife of Thor, the equal of any man and better than most. She is the good mother and friend of the faithful.

Saint Adelind of Yaro

A shield maiden of Sif named Adelind fou
heroically and gave her life in defense of K
against the undead of Morgau at Yarosbir
devoted to Sif's Order of the Spear. Storie
Sif collected Adelind's spirit from the batt
where she fell, and that the saint answers t
of women and shield maidens who swear
vengeance against the darakhul and their
masters. Her symbol is the snowdrop, a fl
blooms even in frost and snow.

Worshippers

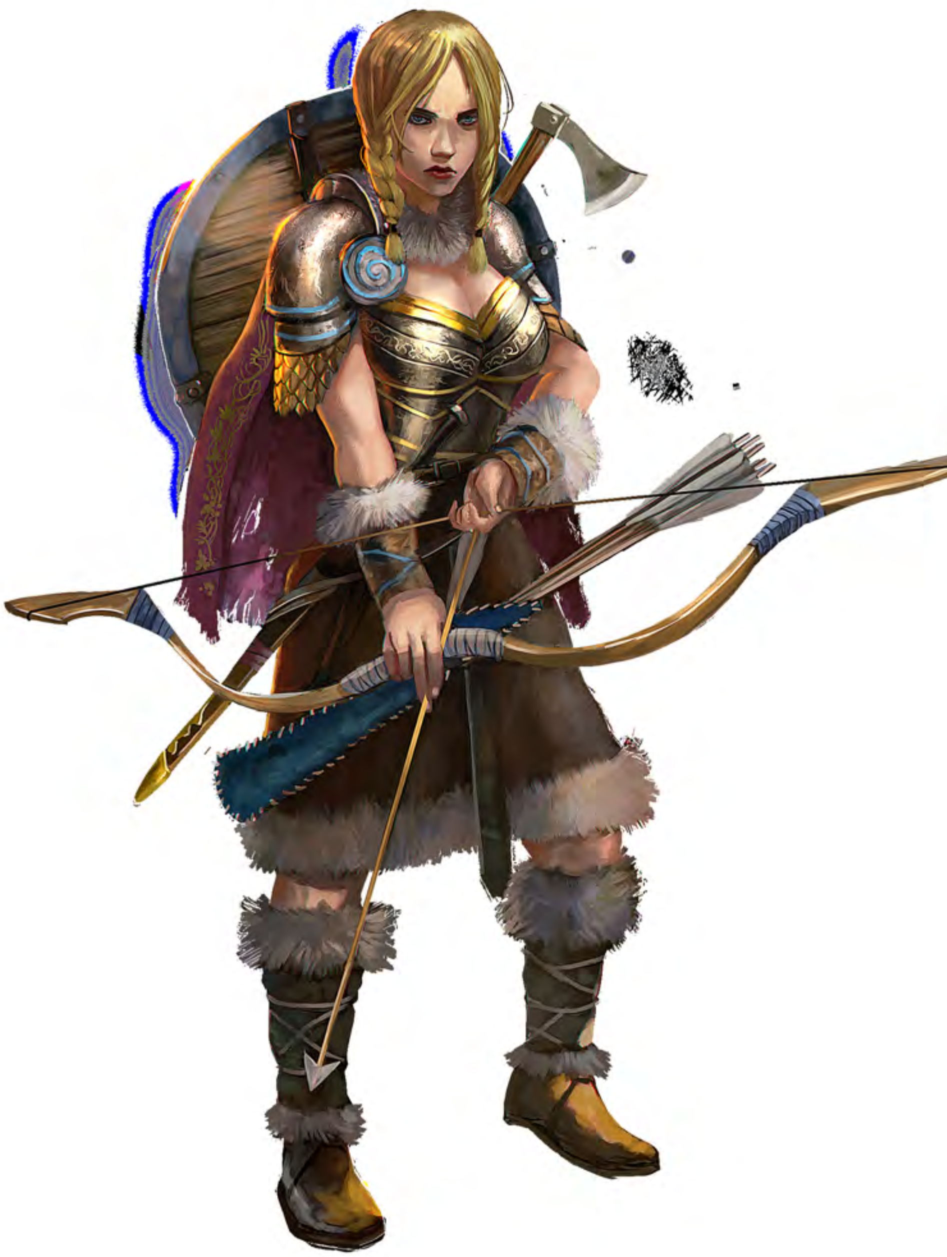
Married and unmarried women comprise most of Sif's followers, though archers, farmers, and gold-seeking dwarves all maintain varying degrees of fondness for her as well. All female warriors give Sif her due as leader of the valkyries and shield maidens. She is also worshipped in Perunalia as a sister to their duchess.

Symbols and Books

Sif's symbol is a brace of arrows. Her priests keep no books.

Priests and Shrines

Sif's greatest shrine is the wooden church of Jarlshallen, a small village on a mountaintop of Vidim . Her shield maidens gather there each year for blessings, and the valkyries bless the men and women who come to her each spring before the raiding season and each fall before the giants come down from the ice and mountains. Her priestesses include prophets and oracles.



Masks

Some believe Sif is a mask of Lada in the south, though others associate her more closely with Ceres or Ninkash. She is known as Grajava the Shield Maiden among the dwarves and Skadi among the giants.

Other Faiths

Sif is on excellent terms with followers of Thor, Lada, and Svarog. She is the unwavering enemy of Boreas, Chernobog, and Marena.

What Sif Demands

Be fierce and be faithful, and fight for what you believe in. Learn the bow and axe and spear as a warrior, or raise children to be strong and true, and do either or both with your whole heart. Stand strong in the summer and learn to bend in the winter storm. Strike down evil and practice your own excellence without ever insulting another's skill.

Thor

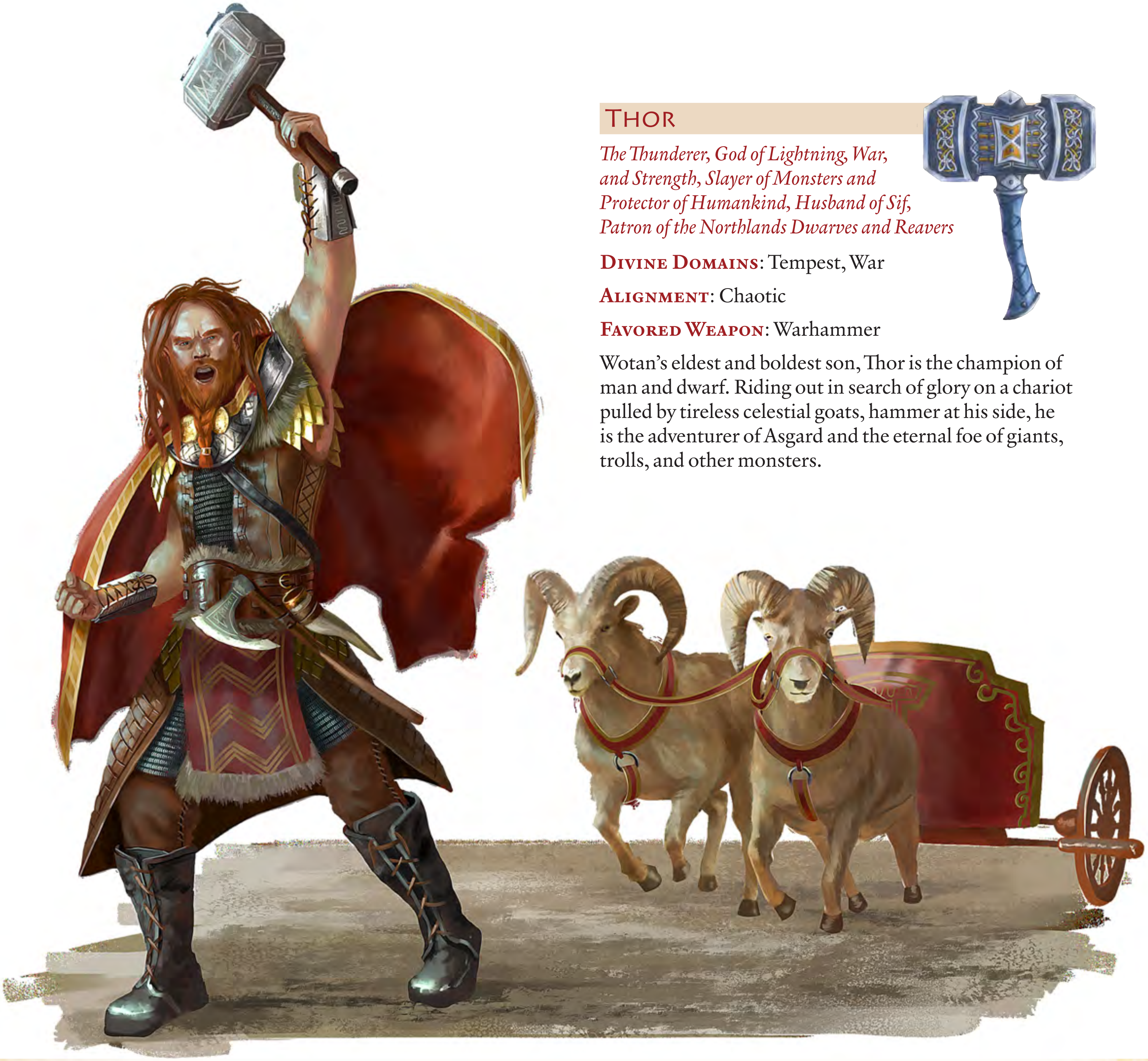
The Thunderer, God of Lightning, War, and Strength, Slayer of Monsters and Protector of Humankind, Husband of Sif, Patron of the Northlands Dwarves and Reavers

Divine Domains: Tempest, War

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapon: Warhammer

Wotan's eldest and boldest son, Thor is the champion of man and dwarf. Riding out in search of glory on a chariot pulled by tireless celestial goats, hammer at his side, he is the adventurer of Asgard and the eternal foe of giants, trolls, and other monsters.



Thor is typically depicted as a large man with a wild red mane and beard, filled with daring courage and none too bright. Countless godlings and ancient spirits fell beneath his hammer, and to this day Northern monsters and especially giants fear and hate him.

The dwarves are wary of Thor, for although he created them alongside Volund, he also smote their halls when they dared to favor the smith god over him. Reaver dwarves invoke him both as creator and for vengeance and retribution.

Worshippers

Reaver dwarves and Northlanders worship Thor as the god of war and raiding, of thunder and glory. As a great defender of the North and a good husband to his divine wife Sif, he is widely revered by elders, wives, and villagers, not just those who go a-viking.

Symbols and Books

His hammer is the symbol of strength and thunder, fertility, and protection from the supernatural. Everyone from raiders to farmers make offerings to Thor. Warriors look to him for strength and bravery, while peaceful folk display his hammer to ward off trolls and keep danger from their doors. Its touch blesses newborns with strength, secures marriage vows, and drives back undead. His strength is both physical and spiritual.

The followers of Thor have no sacred books, though his songs and chants are common and widely known.

Shrines and Priests

The Ironcrags and the North hold the greatest shrines
to Thor, especially in Wintersheim, Tanserhall, and the
Shrine of Golden Hammers in Thun
greatest priest of Thor is Ulfrich Tho
cleric 10 [Thor]), of the dwarven Ord
in Thunder Mountain.

Masks

Thor, Perun, and Mavros are all relat
masks. Worshippers of all three gods
though some rivalry exists about whi
of the god. In Dornig, Thor goes by t

Other Faiths

Thor is the eternal enemy of Cherno
Vardesain, and Boreas, and all the dark gods of the giants and the south. His allies are Sif, Wotan, and Baldur. Loki is his half-brother, and yet Thor finds him vexing as often as not.

What Thor Demands

Thor's worshippers invoke him with deeds, not words. They shout
his name during battles and duels, ar
challenge to monsters in the wild. H
are battlefields new and old, where w
oaths of brotherhood with runes of p
and the sacrifice of bears and oxen. F
emulate his deeds of strength and br
fearing death or evading an honorab
fall bravely in battle is the perfect enc
Thunderer has little love for those wl
"straw death," meaning a death from
age, on the comfort of a straw mattre
the iron and blood of battle.

WOTAN, THE RUNE FATHER

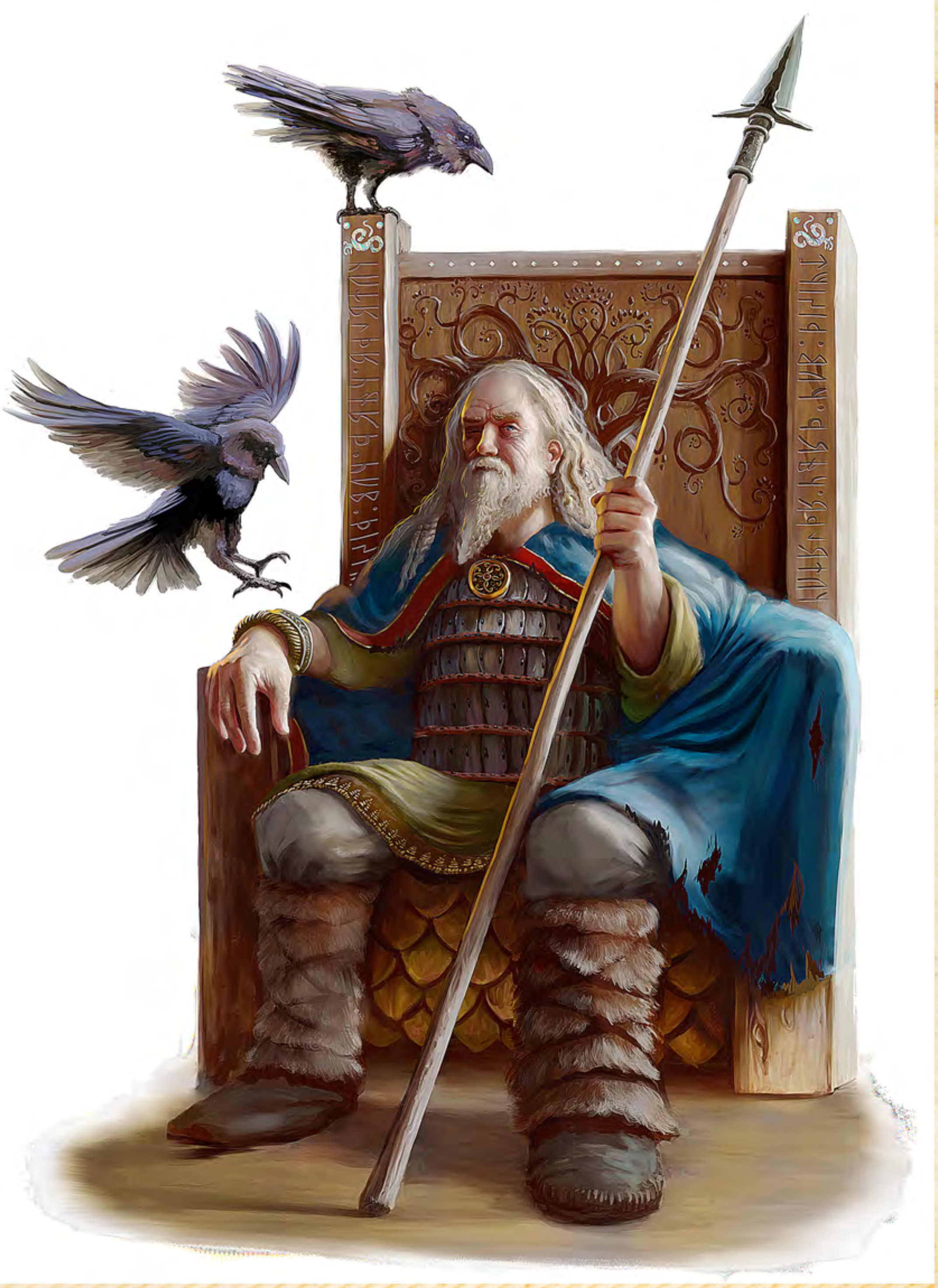
All Father, Rune Master, God of the Tree and Raven, God of Strife, King of Asgard and Lord of Valhalla, Patron of Kings and Wizards, Shaman of the Gods

Divine Domains: Justice, Knowledge, Prophecy, War

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapon: Spear

Thor and Baldur might be more beloved by the people, but Wotan stands head and shoulders above his kin in



of the first giant to make the world; he is the magician who stole runes and charms from the unknown Void. He rewards the heroic dead with a place at his table and is the patron of proud and ruthless kings. Ravens fly across the world to bring him news and rumors, and from his enchanted throne he can spy upon all creation. He plucked out his own eye in return for wisdom, and when that wasn't enough he hung himself upon the Tree of Worlds, stealing secrets from the Void beyond existence. His name is a kenning for wisdom, poetry, and the kingly arts of war.

Wotan embodies the virtues of a strong king—foresighted and wise, ruthless toward his enemies but generous to followers, master of magic and lord of war. He is the god of strife, chieftains, and kings, master of runes and stealer of wisdom. He slew Aurgelmir the first giant and so earned the enmity of all giantkind. Their continuing battles have been largely one-sided; Wotan's superior cunning and wisdom ensure he triumphs time and time again.

Worshippers

Despite such virtues, Wotan's followers are relatively few. Wotan is dour and his gifts carry a price; he is most beloved by the few jarls, wizards, and graybeards who value wisdom. Young warriors and maidens see no value in such a grandfatherly figure.

Among dwarves, the worship of Wotan the All-Father represents a step in life, beyond callow youth and into maturity and middle age. Older men and dwarves proclaim their loyalty at his shrines and feed his ravens bread, but some women revere Wotan as well, for the swift news his ravens bring or for the power of rune magic.

In addition, Wotan has many followers among the huginn (ravenfolk). They see him as the greatest of figures, for his servants are feathered and wise, and Wotan is as wily as every huginn wishes to be.

Symbols and Books

Wotan's symbols are many, including the world tree Yggdrasil, the single eye, and the runes. Sometimes ravens and wolves (his favored animals) are taken as his sign as well.

His holy writings are exclusively in the Northern Tongue, and include the Well of Mimir, the Tree of Knowledge, and the scroll called the Secret Runes. Writing is his his favored form of recording wisdom; he expects all his followers to be literate.

Shrines and Priests

The greatest shrine of Wotan is in the dwarven hall of Stannasgard, where the chanting of the rune chorus never ceases and the altar fires burn in his honor. The kings and captains of the dwarven reavers are Wotan's priests or at least his devoted worshippers. The greatest of his current high priests is Brökk Kolisen, a black-bearded man who was orphaned and raised among the dwarves, loved and respected for his understanding of their ways.

Masks

Wotan is called Ellel by the horse tribes and elves of the East, Az among the angelic folk of Ishadia, and Gades the Titan among the haunted giants. Some associate him with Aten, but this is a dubious claim at best. For the most part, Wotan wears few masks and walks under his own name.

Other Faiths

Wotan is a solitary god and rarely venerated outside the Northlands and the Ironcrags, although he is popular among the Bemmean mages for his connection to lore and magic. Wotan's priests are enemies of Sarastra, the goddess of night and magic. Wotan's son Loki is his primary antagonist in the North, though Wotan's priests also keep watch against the forces of dark gods such as Mammon, the Goat of the Woods, the White Goddess, and the derro goddess Addrikah, the Mother of Madness.

What Wotan Demands

Wotan demands that his mortal servants embody the qualities for which he's famous, so most of them are jarls and kings. Warriors pray to him, hoping to earn luck and victory in battle, or if defeat is fated then to attract the attention of his valkyries and a place in Valhalla. Wotan demands his followers be canny in judgment, skilled in poetry, and quick to lead men into honorable battle. Cowards and fools find no sympathy from the Rune God.

Design Note: Gods and Alignment

I'm not a fan of giving gods specific alignments; it seems to put them in a box, and true gods are above mortal morality, or apart from it. But given the requirements of roleplaying games, the entries provide some hints at alignment, though in many cases, they note only the preferred axis of the divine being's alignment.

For example, Loki is described as Chaotic, meaning his priests may be Chaotic Good, Chaotic Neutral, or Chaotic Evil. This might correspond to different factions or tendencies within a faith, though it might also mean that the god is poorly understood and contradictory.

CROSSROADS GODS

From the Ironcrag Cantons to the Free City of Zobecl Perunalia to the Magdar Kingdom, the Crossroads re revels in contrasts and confusion, and its gods are like a collection of many creeds and visitors. Gods from al points of the compass live here or wander through.

The gods of the Crossroads also meddle heavily in human affairs, and many are patrons of the Crossroac nations. The former king of the pantheon, Khors, is fading from influence as Rava usurps his position in n places, but he has not vanished by any means. The Sun God still shines in the Magdar Kingdom and Grisal, a his adherents value his power against night's terrors. T elven gods once common in this region, including Yar and Porevit, Baccho, and Holda, still have some influe but their temples and shrines are few and fading.

The people of the Crossroads know their gods share their worries and concerns, and they fill the altars with sincere offerings. Religious faith in the Crossroads is strangely variable since gods come and go here as if or their way to somewhere else. The sudden arrival of nev gods like Rava and the slow fading of older ones like K is not unusual here. This changeability makes religiou in the Crossroads lively.

Khors

Lord of the Sun, Bright Master of the Chariot, Son of Svarog, the Perfect Knight, Lord of Light and Destroyer of the Darkness, Patron of the Magdar, Friend to Magus and Warrior

Divine Domains: Justice, Light

Alignment: Lawful Good

Favored Weapon: Lance, longsword

Though the Sun God is in decline in the Crossroads, Khors still stands supreme within the Magdar Kingdc His numerous statues feature his feathered cloak, hea armor, and wild helmet plumes. He is depicted strikin down dragons, knighting new heroes, and defending common people against the darkness and terrors of n

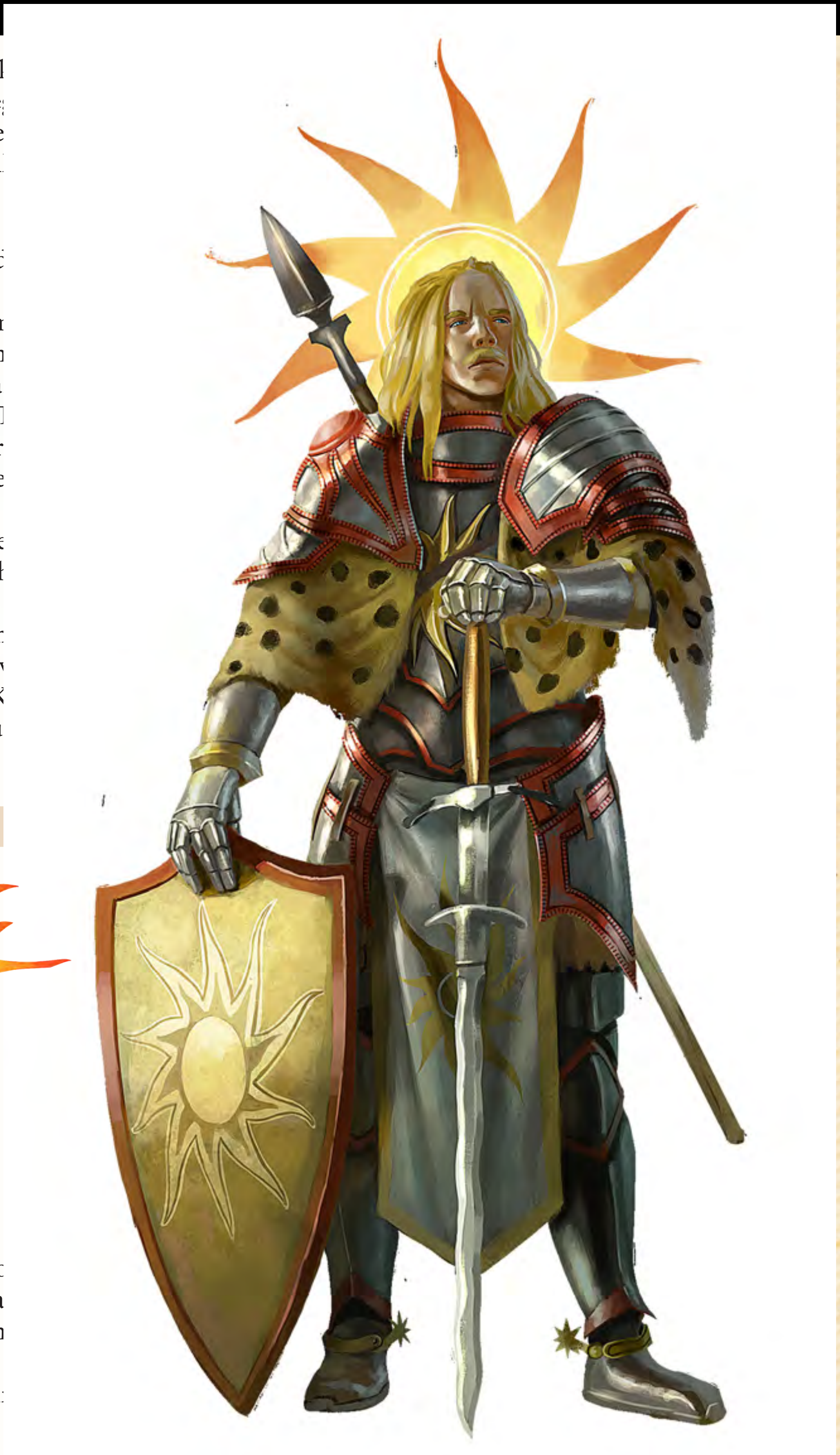


TABLE 12-2: MAJOR GODS OF THE CROSSROADS

Name	Typical Worshippers
Khors	Knights, Magdar, dwarves
Lada (Baldur)	Women, centaurs, bearfolk, children
Perun	Soldiers, watchmen, farmers
Rava (Ariadne)	Gearforged, merchants, kobolds
Volund (Svarog)	Dwarves, Kariv, smiths

Worshippers

The knights of the Order of the Undying Sun are Khors's largest remaining bastion of influence, and he is still widely worshipped in the Magdar Kingdom, Grisal, and (covertly) in Rumela and Krakovar. Elsewhere, he is largely forgotten.

Symbols and Books

Khors's symbol is a radiant sun, and his sacred text is called the Book of the Sun, divided into a First Sun and New Sun portion.

SHRINES AND PRIESTS

Since they worship a declining god, the priests of Khors know how to slip into other temples and other priesthoods, and many of Khors's priests are pantheist priests (see *MHH*). His worship once extended far to the East, but most places now venerate other gods. The temple in Zobeck is now devoted more to his father Svarog than to Khors. Some of his priests have lately gone to Triolo seeking converts; it might be fertile ground, since the city hosts the head of the church, High Sunpriest Salomonn Csabos (LG male human cleric 14 [Khors]), a refugee from conquered Illyria.

MASKS

Many assume Khors to be a mask of Aten, in a less jealous
guise. Others believe he is related to Baldur in the North,
or to Lada. In Marea and Achillon he is called Apoll
and is part of a minor pantheon that humans retain
the Mharoti Empire; in Ishadia he is honored as Q

OTHER FAITHS

Khors is the unrelenting enemy of Sarastra, the Wh
Goddess, Marena, and Vardesain, and all dark gods

WHAT KHORS DEMANDS

Rise and pray at dawn and noon. Bring light to the
darkness; never approach a foe by stealth, but only
and openly. Cast down demons, devils, and the dar
without quarter. Stand fast in battle, for courage is
greatest virtue of the warrior. If you must retreat, m
clear your intention to return and win the day. Let n
shadow harm the innocent.

LADA

The Golden Goddess of Dawn, Love, and Mercy, the Bear Maiden, Lady of the Healing Hand, Daughter of Aten, Mistress of the Petal Palm, Patron of Mothers and Children, Wife of Volund

DIVINE DOMAINS: Life, Light

ALIGNMENT: Good

FAVORED WEAPON: Staff and scimitar

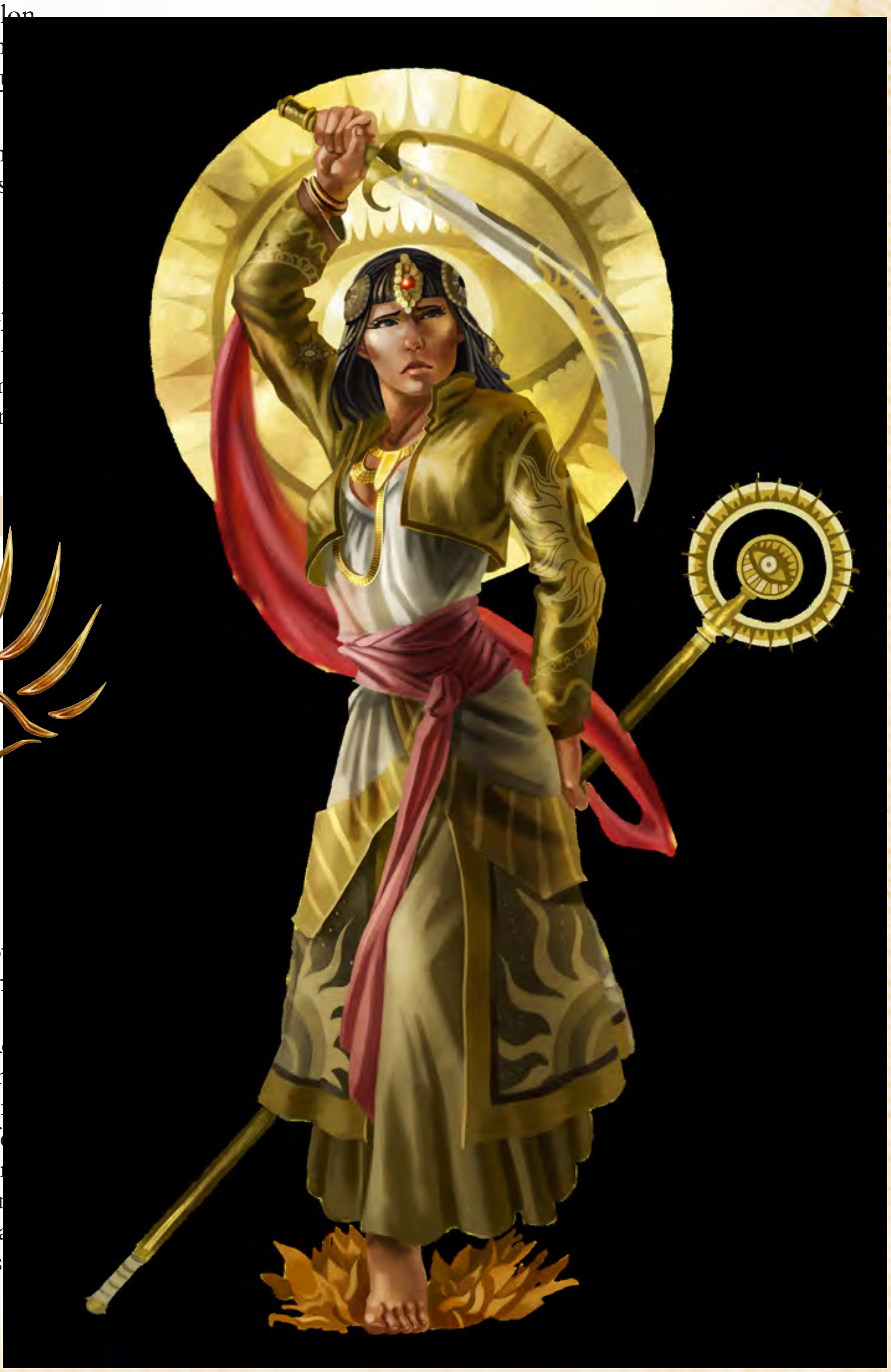
Everyone loves Lada, the goddess of healing and lo
although few truly follow her teachings of mercy an
forgiveness. She is a maidenly goddess of the dawn
the day, and the enemy of the cult of Marena, the R
Goddess. Although depicted as meek and mild in m
of her idols and images, she has a powerfully wrath
side, sometimes called the Bear Maiden, which def
children, the elderly, and the weak. Her attributes i
compassion and mercy, though in some cases that
can seem harsh, such as destruction of the undead a
granting merciful death to suffering plague victims

Lada appears as a young woman with braided black hair and bright green or blue eyes. She wears flowers in every season but winter, and fragrant rose petals cover her altars.

WORSHIPPERS

Lada has many worshippers, for does not everyone wish for mercy, healing, and light? Young mothers, children, and the sick are all her devotees, as are many paladins (especially women) and some rangers, dervishes, and southern travelers. Her shrines and charms are common among the centaurs, the Rothenian elves, and humans from north to south.

These followers see her in their own race's form (a centaur maiden, an elven matron, or a human woman), but they concede that this outer seeming is a bridge to worship. All utter similar prayers and hold their rites at daybreak.



SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

Lada's symbol is the radiant eye, and her followers are referred to as "bright-eyed." Some of her orders use roses or other flowers as symbols of Lada as well, though these are more common in the North and Crossroads than in the South where her faith originates.

Lada's books are both holy scriptures and medical tracts. The Golden Book of Ruby Laughter describes worship of the sun, and the Codex of Herbals, Prayers, and Simples is the touchstone of Lada's healing lore.

SHRINES AND PRIESTS

Lada's holiest sites are those on high ground, where the dawn breaks earliest. For this reason, her temples sit on hills or mountaintops or (when no high ground is available) are built with a large dawn steeple. The main doors to her temples face east.

The current high priestess in Zobeck is Lucca Angeli, a human woman born and raised in the Free City. She spent her youth adventuring and made her reputation during one of the many sieges of Zobeck, when her steadfastness helped the Griffon Knights repel a dark army of fey.

The largest of Lada's temples is the Temple of the Rosy Dawn in the Magdar Kingdom capital of Cronepisht, though the Temple of Loving Mercy on the holy river-island near Laksor in Nuria Natal is considered Lada's birthplace and her holiest shrine. Many of her temples function as hospitals and plague wards, and in the South they are frequently paired with the temples of Anu-Akma, since even Lada's grace cannot save everyone from death's embrace forever.

Lada's shrines are also common in the fields and at crossroads. Prayers are held at the first light of dawn, and sometimes a farewell prayer at sunset.

MASKS

In the Crossroads, Lada is the source of all things good, closely associated with the health and hearth. In parts of the South, especially Nuria Natal and Ishadia, she is called Hathor, Isis, or Astarte. She is the calm face of reason, healing, and rebirth, and the voice of hope.

Lada is called Baldur in the North, and he is considered the god of excellence and virtues. Among the bearfolk, she is the much-loved Bengta the Bear Maiden. On the Rothenian Plain she is Kamrusepa and wears an elven face. In a few places in the West she is associated with Charun the boatman and guardian of the dead, but this is uncommon.

OTHER FAITHS

Lada is said to be Aten's daughter, though the two priesthoods rarely get along. Lada and her divine brother Khors are more compatible.

Lada is the unflinching enemy of the three evil sisters, as her priests refer to Marena the Red, Sarastra of the Night, and the White Goddess. However, her greatest enemy is Mavros-Perun, the god of war and thunder, whose destruction and bloodshed her priests find abhorrent. Priestesses of Lada rarely serve in an army devoted to Mavros. Lada despises all those who prey on the weak or the sick.

WHAT LADA DEMANDS

Cure all the sick who ask. Defend lovers from all dangers and trials. Show mercy to those who ask it. Members of Lada's clergy must make a pilgrimage to the healing school of Laksor once every 12 years. All her faithful must defend and protect mothers and children, and none may turn away from poverty and want without a kind word and an offer of help, whether that takes the form of wisdom, food, clothing, a song, or shelter for the night.

PERUN

God of War and Thunder, Lord of Strife and Rebirth, Patron of Valera and the Seven Cities, Lord of the Storm Court

DIVINE DOMAINS: Beer, Tempest, War

ALIGNMENT: Neutral

FAVORED WEAPONS: Longsword, spear

Perun, the god of war and thunder, is the Lord of the Storm Court in the Crossroads and on the Rothenian Plain. His chorus is the sound of spear on shield, his ceremony is the tramp of boots marching and mustering. Perun seeks to expand conflict between nations and to strengthen his worshippers against their enemies. He is the bright blade of youths at their first Mustering, and the notched edge of gray-bearded veterans. All turn to him in times of anger and know his service is an honorable estate, as long as they do not break the Edicts of Just War.

At first glance Perun is the simplest of gods—a creature of destruction, strength, and war. His deeper aspect promises healing and rebirth, since his mysteries involve not just death and glory, but also resurrection and a cleansing of the soul. Most soldiers, guards, bandits, and scouts make offerings to Perun.

In his cavern-temples he brings the greatest warriors back to fight once more, through resurrection at his priests' command. Perun's role in resurrection is tied to his role as a master of the spear-maidens, angelic figures said to have once visited Midgard in corporeal form to rule it with complete justice.

Though primarily a god of war and thunder, Perun is also the god of chaos and rebirth. The chaos of war is well regarded in the North, or at least respected, but it is considered something to be mastered by priests in the south, who see chaos as an undesirable but irrefutable aspect of the storms of war.

Worshippers

Humans are Perun's most devoted worshippers, especially those of the Seven Cities (who call him Mavros), the Magdar Kingdom, the Rothenian Plain, and the Grand Duchy along the southern border with the Goblin Wastes. Soldiers and guards, farmers and shepherds alike appeal to the Lord of War and Thunder for strength and guidance.

Symbols and Books

All weapons of war are weapons of Perun, and yet his favorites remain the spear and sword. Minotaurs associate the axe with the Bloody God of War. Many of his worshippers use a lightning bolt, a red bull, or a red circle in their heraldry.

The holy writings of Perun include the 25 Martial Books and the mystical Soldier's Journey. The first is written in the Northern Tongue, and the second in the Southern Tongue, but both are translated for his priests in other regions.

Shrines and Priests

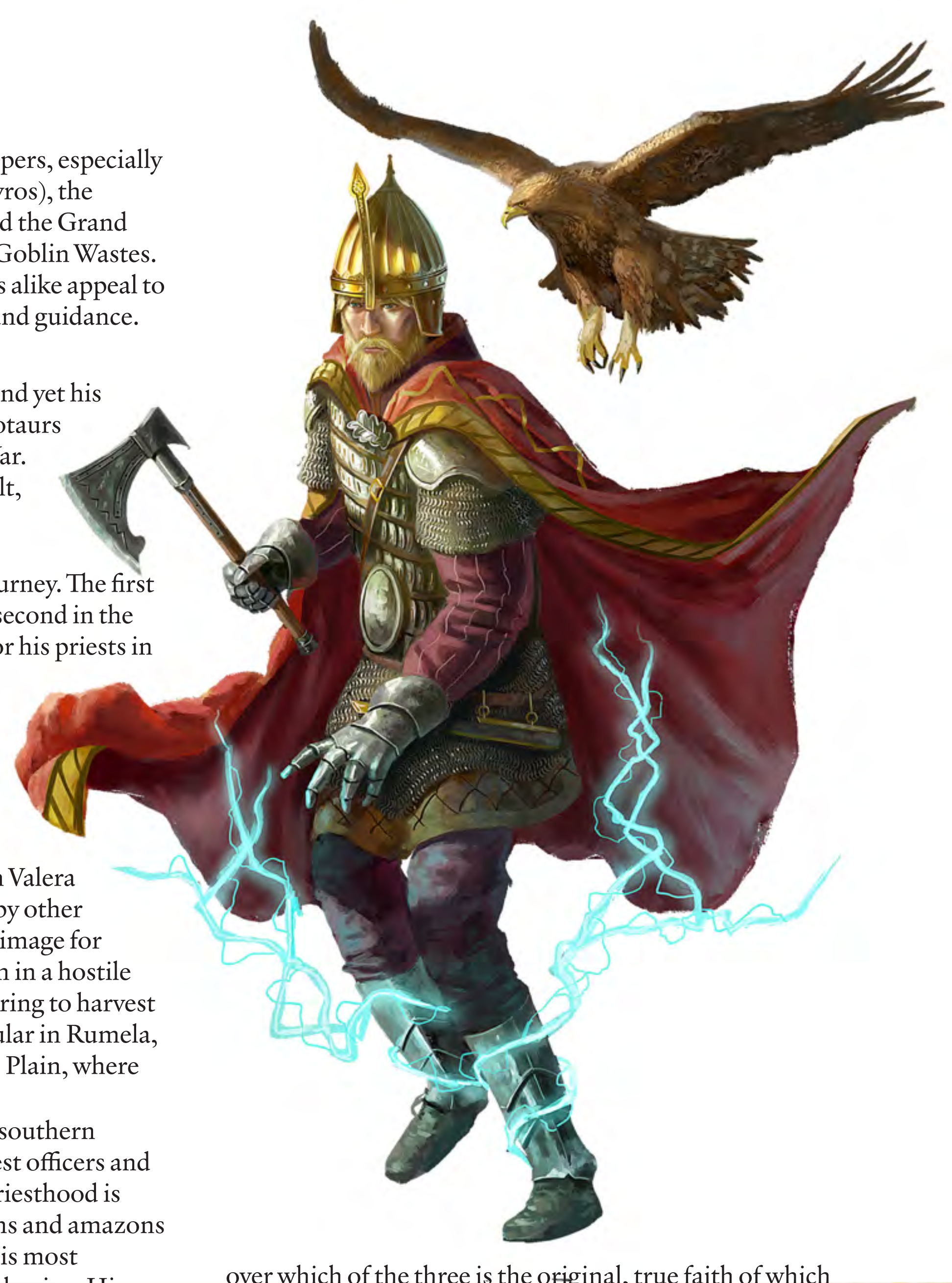
The most famous sites for the worship of Perun are the House of Swords in Valera, the Temple of Twin Thunderbolts in Donnermark, the Seat of Mavros in the Wasted West, and the Fist of Mavros within Valera (which grants access to those who call him by other names). The Seat of Mavros is a site of pilgrimage for soldiers every year, and a bastion of the faith in a hostile land. Mavros is invoked constantly from spring to harvest time in the Seven Cities, and he is also popular in Rumela, Krakovar, Perunalia, and on the Rothenian Plain, where he is admired by the centaurs.

His priests frequently serve as officers in southern armies, and they are considered both the best officers and among the worst (given his fanatics). The priesthood is more than 80% male, though shield maidens and amazons are well represented. The worship of Perun is most common in spring, as the campaign season begins. His priests are indistinguishable from mercenary captains, and indeed some serve as captains in the Free Companies.

The best known orders of Perun include the priesthoods of the Numinous Spear, the Keepers of the Seat, and the Defenders of the Lightning Fist. The Order of the Storm in Perunalia is considered somewhat heretical, since it emphasizes the storm god's side of the faith, and it rejects the primacy of war—the same order in the Magdar Kingdom is more orthodox. Despite this, few wish to cross the god's daughters in battle, for their battle-rage is as great as any man's when required.

Masks

Perun is the voice of the thunder and war—and perhaps one of the least subtle masks in any pantheon. Surely this is the same god called Thor in the North, Mavros in the Seven Cities and the Wastes, and even Mavrash in distant Ishadia. Yet the three faiths differ in emphasis quite a bit, more like brawling brothers than twins. And the argument over which of the three is the original, true faith of which the other two are masked reflections is a contentious one.



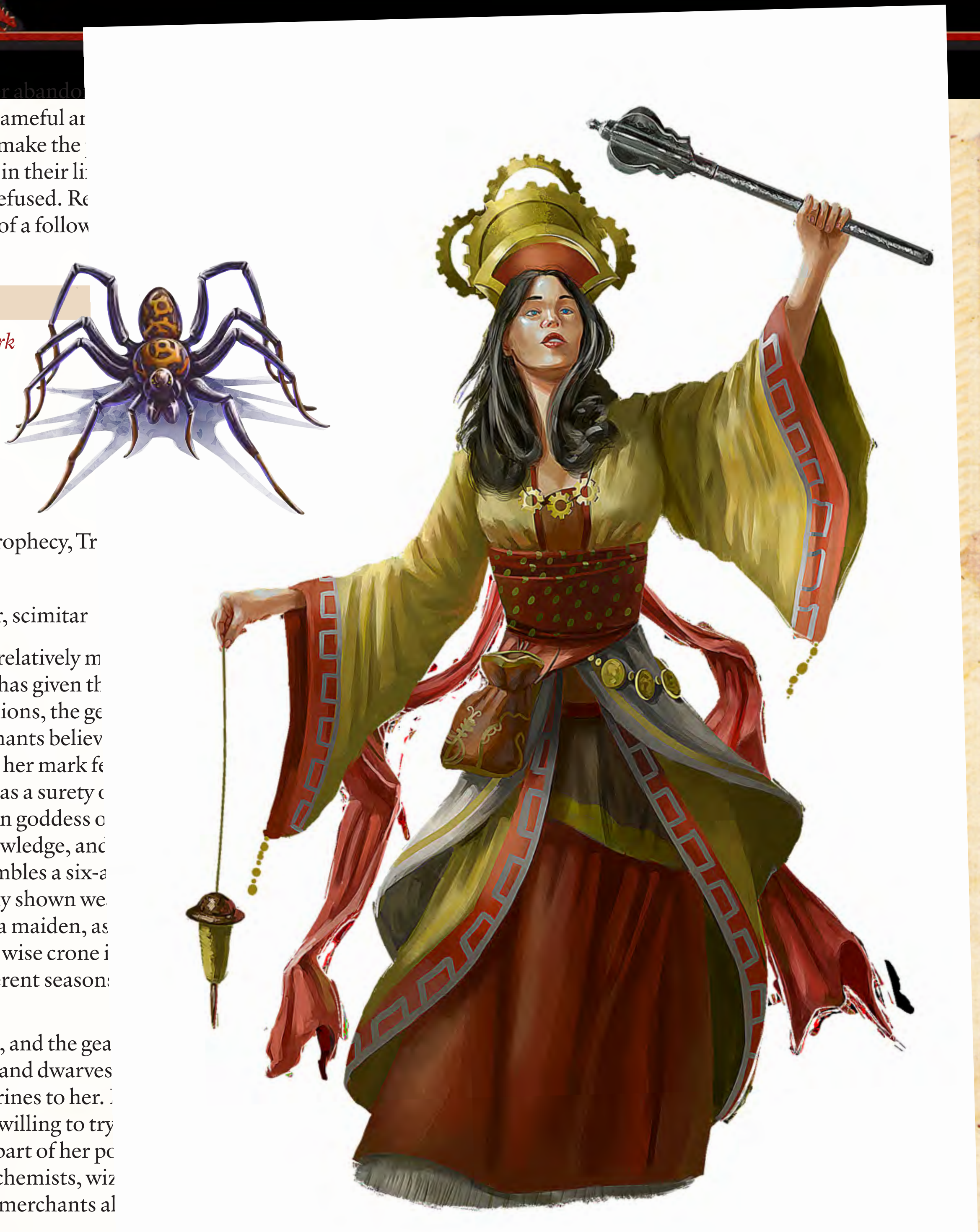
Other Faiths

Perun is the husband of Marena the Red Goddess in the North and Crossroads. He is also the son of Wotan in the North. Yet he is scarcely connected to other faiths, since his priests emphasize soldiers as his children and victory as his only love. Perun's greatest enemies include Lada the Golden Goddess, whose priests scorn the honorable wounds of battle and urge peace rather than strife, as well as Hecate, a deceptive goddess of schemes and dishonor, and the dishonorable Hunter, whose bloodshed is wasteful and ignoble.

What Perun Demands

Perun wants action! Worshippers are expected to seek out battle and keep their martial skills well honed. The perfect death for a follower of Perun is on the battlefield—they abhor death of old age. Followers of Perun must attend the mysteries at his temple before any great battle or

long journey, and must never abando
on the field. Cowardice is shameful ar
worshippers of Perun must make the
Seat of Mavros at least once in their li
and combats may never be refused. Re
but victory is the finest goal of a follow



RAVA (ARIADNE)

The Gear Goddess, the Clockwork Oracle, Mother of Industry, Spinner of Fate, Merchant Goddess, Patron of the City of Zobeck, Patron of Weavers and the Gearforged

DIVINE DOMAINS: Clockwork, Knowledge, Prophecy, Tr

ALIGNMENT: Lawful

FAVORED WEAPON: Dagger, scimitar

Patron of Zobeck, Rava is a relatively m
goddess whose beneficence has given th
autoscribes, clockwork scullions, the ge
and other inventions. Merchants believ
blesses their hard work, and her mark fe
contracts and bills of lading as a surety c
or payment. She is the patron goddess o
and a sponsor of magic, knowledge, and

Rava's physical form resembles a six-a
woman, and she is frequently shown we
or spinning. She appears as a maiden, as
mother of industry, and as a wise crone i
different shrines and at different season

WORSHIPPERS

The industrious, the learned, and the gea
are Rava's closest followers, and dwarves
and kobolds all maintain shrines to her.
hard-working followers are willing to try
novelty and invention are a part of her pc
as tradition and crafting. Alchemists, wiz
guild masters, weavers, and merchants al
wise counsel.

SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

Rava's priestesses have written dozens of volumes of prophecy at the Clockwork Oracle in Zobeck, and keep a dozen more of the sacred works of Ariadne on the southern islands. These books are closely guarded; most of their predictions do come true in time. The priesthood sells the knowledge within them to their wealthiest followers and gives it away to the most fervent and boldest followers, the paladins and inquisitors of the faith. These are most often gearforged heroes.

Rava's symbols are the gear and the spider. Many of her priestesses carry a spindle for thread and spin as often as possible, the better to feed the looms of Rava's weaving spiders. Her priests build looms in her shrines and work as scribes for all who need thoughts put to paper (for a modest donation).

SHRINES AND PRIESTS

Lena Ravovik is the current human high priestess of Rava. Her surname is traditional for human priests and priestesses of Rava in the Crossroads, who abandon their families and former lives when they enter the service of the goddess. Other prominent clerics include the current dwarven high priest in Zobeck, Ondli Firedrake, and Alkestis, the high priestess on the island of Archae.

The most famous of her clergy are the goddess-forged. These powerful clerics have been blessed to become immortal, magical machines. Their bodies become completely covered in metal, and they gain the construct type and other abilities as a gearforged. (See *MHH* for details of this race.)

OTHER FAITHS

Rava is not fond of Bastet's sybaritic luxuries and even less fond of the wild madness of Addrikah, the derro mother of madness and chaos, whose works are abominations. Rava is considered cool or hostile to the followers of Yarila and Porevit, and she has a longstanding-but-genial feud with Volund over whose artifice and creation skills are greater.

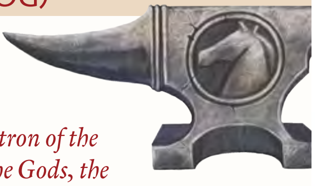
MASKS

Rava is called Ariadne in some southern realms, and she is a great patron of weavers, jewelers, and scribes. In the North, she is associated with the Norns. A few believe she is a female mask of Thoth-Hermes, Kwanzi, or Sothis-Shai.

WHAT RAVA DEMANDS

Rava demands her followers be wise and hard-work
They prize learning and scholarship, and the discov
and making of new things. As a goddess of both nov
and fate, she demands her followers seek out new le
and steer the world's fate to peace and plenty. In Zol
Rava's followers must defend her patron city agains
threat that the Clockwork Oracle identifies. Rava de
sloth, idleness, and luxury.

VOLUND (SVAROG)



Master of Fire and Anvil, God of Horses, Smiths, and Marriage, Patron of the Cantons, Patron of the Kariv, Master Smith of the Gods, the Wanderer, the Rider

DIVINE DOMAINS: Forge, Travel, Mountain

ALIGNMENT: Neutral

FAVORED WEAPON: Hammer (humans), battle axe (dwarves)

Volund is the god of earth and fire, of the hammer's
as it lands upon the anvil and the hiss of steam as a n
forged sword is quenched. He is one of the divine pa
of the reaver dwarves, but many races revere him as
master craftsman and lord of all the jewels and prec
metals in the earth.

Though primarily a god of fire, creation, and smit
work, Volund is also the god of family and hospitalit
especially among humans.

Marriage is sacred to the faith (since it forges a bo
between two people), as are horses. The Kariv say Vo
stole the first steeds from Boreas and showed mank
how to tame them. Dwarves everywhere scoff at suc
tales, but the Khazzaki of the Rothenian Plain prais

aspect above all, revering him as the Rider, master of the open steppe and guarantor of their freedom.

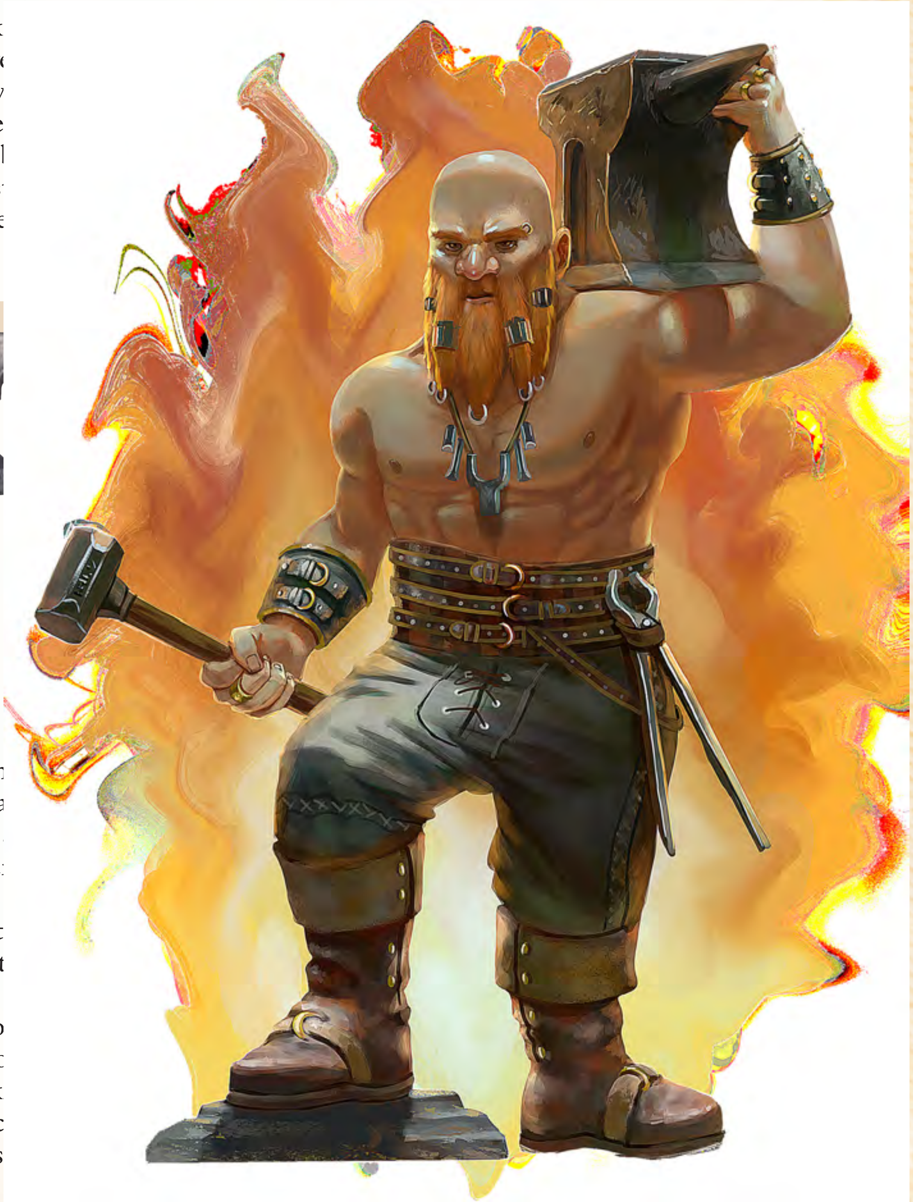
In his youth he was a great traveler—some even dare to say a mortal—and in his wanderings taught many races to forge not only swords and shields but laws and communities. If angered he was merciless in his revenge, crafting cursed items that still linger in Midgard and cause trouble into the present day.

WORSHIPPERS

Reaver dwarves, cantonal dwarves, the Kariv and the Khazzaki of the Rothenian Plain, and the people of Zobeck are all especially fond of Volund. Most nations recognize him as at least a lesser god, and smiths everywhere venerate him.

SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

The symbols of Volund are his anvil and his weapons, the hammer among humans and the battle axe among dwarves (called the shashka, among the Khazzaki).



His holy writings are the Book of the Anvil and the Saga of Volund's Wanderings, both written in the Northern tongue and concerned with tempering both steel and souls.

Shrines and Priests

Volund is one of the most widely worshipped gods, with major temples in the Free Cantons, Dornig, the Northlands, and in the Crossroads and Seven Cities. The greatest of these many forge-shrines includes the Great Temple of the Sacred Hammer in Templeforge, where iron is smelted to provide light during services and where the anvils rarely rest. The Shrine of a Thousand Anvils in Stannasgard is also a famous site of pilgrimages.

The greatest priests vary in style and temperament. The young master smith Hydrig Vallesulm in Salzbach is devout and talented, but so is the more aggressive Øpir Skapti (NG male human cleric 9 [Volund]), the priest-captain of the young dwarven company of the Hall of Spears in Stannasgard. Volund's most famous priest is Toveli Rogest, master of Templeforge, a canton of the Ironcrags. He is the keeper of the Great Temple of the Sacred Hammer in those snowy peaks, a place of pilgrimage for many.

Masks

Volund is called Ptah in the South and Veyland among the elves of the Arbonesse, who venerated him as a fletcher and bowyer as well as a smith, and sometimes refer to him as the armorer of Valeresh, the war god. Humans call him Svarog south and east of the Nieder Straits.

Other Faiths

Volund and Rava have always been friendly rivals, and Volund is also on excellent terms with Thor and Perun. Volund is sometimes the lover of Sif and the husband of Lada, depending on who you believe. Volund's greatest enemies include Seggotan and the water gods, Loki the trickster, and Boreas, the god of the North Wind.

What Volund Demands

Volund demands his followers craft great works in his name and harness stone, metal, and fire to their will. Humans call him Svarog and add mastery of riding to his divine demands. His priesthood and many of his worshippers marry young, a sacred act that represents building a family and forging links with their community. They make pilgrimage to shrines and temples far and wide, especially to Volund's hammer shrine in the Free Cantons and anvil shrine in the Northlands. Worshippers must take raw materials or tools with them to donate to the places they visit, and they must add something, no matter how small, that they have personally wrought to every temple they visit.

DRAGON GODS

Semi-draconic, semi-human, these faceless, masked, and jealous elemental gods reign throughout the Mharoti Empire. The draconic gods are all elemental and rather strange, each said to be comforting and familiar to the dragonkin but looming, distant, or even dangerous to the eyes of humans, dwarves, and other less-scaly races.

Nevertheless, given the number of non-dragonkind within their realm, these gods have allowed new rites, new sacred lore, and new festivals that appeal to the human throngs of the empire. In time, the dragon gods might seem less alien and might make inroads beyond the Mharoti lands. For now, though, Midgardians rarely encounter their worship except among the dragonkin, kobolds, and the Mharoti legions. Its practices involve ringing bells and burning huge clouds of incense, and some of its followers believe in various schools of mysticism, meditation, and a form of inner enlightenment. Others focus rapaciously on the earthly and the present.

The wild faith of Veles's children includes astronomy and deep mysteries of the heavens and the stars, and some say even the stars follow the dragon gods. Scaled heralds descend from the Void by night or by day, trailing comets or plumes of bright smoke. The various faces of the gods have competing cults riven by strife and competition, but their followers are certain that their gods are greater, stronger, and vaster than any human pantheon.

Azuran

Lord of the Four Winds, Arbitrator of Victory, Lord of the Skies Beyond the Sky, the Four-Faced Compass, the Gambling God, the First and Final Breath, Patron God of Sikkim and the Ravenfolk

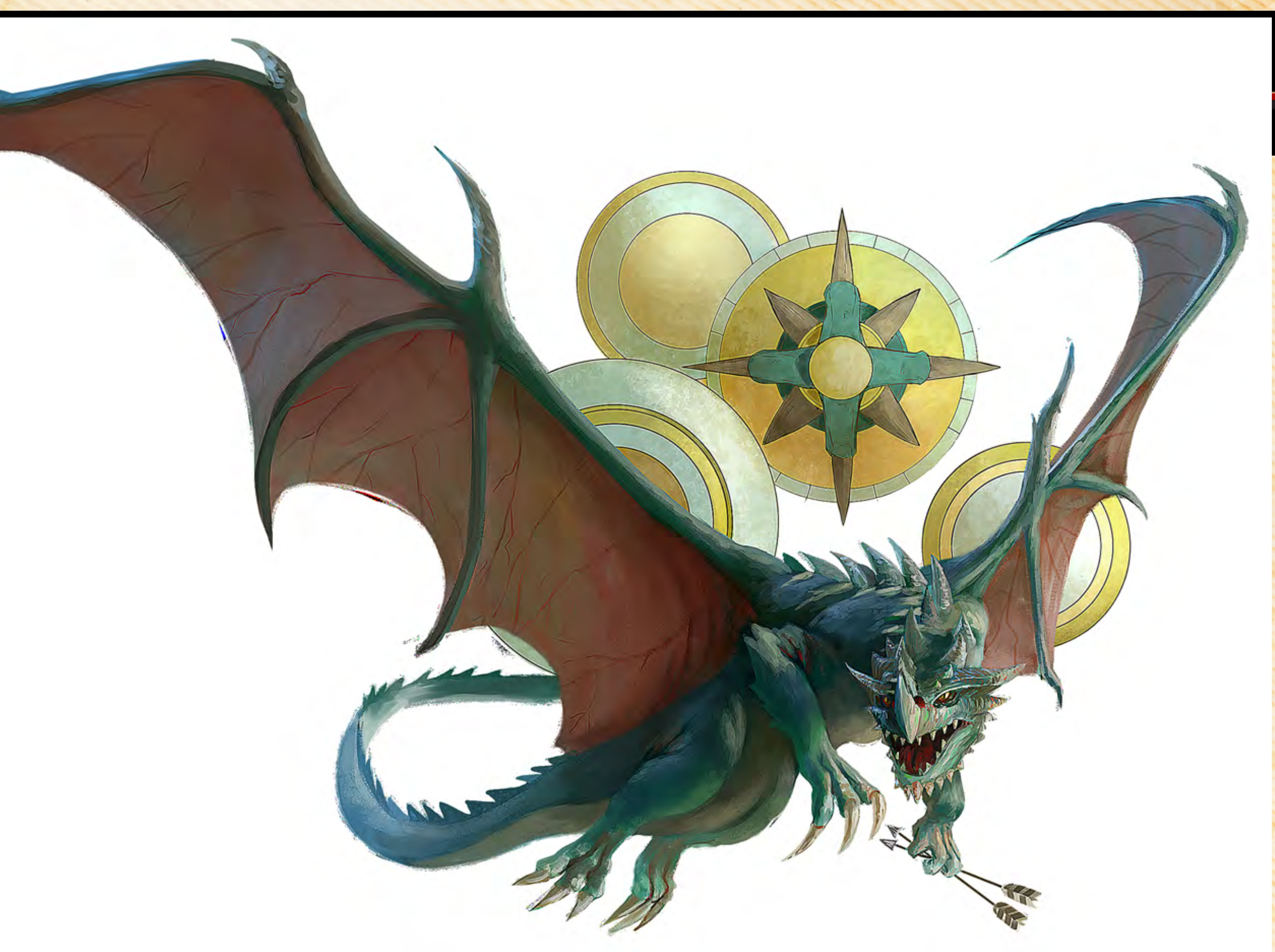
Divine Domains: Dragon, Knowledge, Speed, War

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapon: Shortsword, shortbow

Even among the eastern gods, Azuran seems especially strange. Azuran is a unity of conflicting forces, four great strands of an elemental faith in the wind and the sky. These four gods represent a single god, but they are also the Gathering of Winds, each a separate interpretation of Azuran. The Winds disagree on the finer points of faith, but all agree on the founding ideals: breath is life. Wind and sky are the ultimate expression of divinity.

Azuran is a creature of the roof of heaven, soaring beyond all heights, a calm fury of storm. All who breathe are his creation, and each last breath is an invocation to Azuran. The god of wind sees all things, all fates, and knows all things spoken on the breath; his eye is



WORSHIPPERS

Azuran's believers include humans, dragonkin, ravenfolk, and kobolds, divided into four primary rival sects: the Gamblers of the Eastern Wind, the Savants of the Southern Wind, the Warriors of the Western Wind, and the Wanderers of the Northern Wind. The aspect of the east controls fate and fortune and must be respected by all easterners as a result, especially merchants and gamblers. Warriors seek the western wind's aid in battle, and wizards, oracles, and scholars seek the southern wind's wisdom from beyond the mortal sphere. Sailors and travelers ask for good wandering from his northern aspect.

As the patron of Sikkim, Azuran is the foremost among the gods of that distant city of wonders. Its mighty artificers, priests, and wizards are the most devoted and pious worshippers of Azuran. Other prominent priests include Basha General Azladdan ir-Rahullah, war-cleric and commander of the Mharoti Empire's Windrider Legion and Windspeaker Dariosh of Parthia.

Anyone who seeks luck or the blessings of helpful winds invokes Azuran, and the call strengthens him. The mages of Bemmea and sages at the Great Library find the Azuran teachings intriguing. Over time, the enlightening winds of Azuran blow far into uncivilized lands.

SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

Azuran's faith invites a remarkable number of symbols: four most important ones, and a dozen more for the various factions. The most prominent are a compass rose and images of wind that consist of waving lines, spirals, clouds, an arrow, and concentric circles. Both compass and wind icons sometimes include draconic motifs such as wings or fangs.

TABLE 12–3: MAJOR GODS OF THE DRAGON EMPIRE

Name	Typical Worshippers
Azuran	Dragonkin, kobolds, ravenfolk
Northern Wind	Sailors, travelers, farmers
Southern Wind	Wizards, priests, artificers
Eastern Wind	Gamblers, merchants
Western Wind	Soldiers, warriors
Baal	Mharoti, nobles, drakes
Khespotan	Miners, builders, scholars, soldiers
Seggotan	Sailors, fisherfolk, healers

The core teachings of the Lord of Winds and Victory appear in The Azuran. However, this collection is in dispute, since it contains divergent sections and apocryphal writings. Well known but poorly understood books include the Prophecies of the Wind, the Ephemeral Whispers of Aahuz, and the Invisible Tome of the Unseers.

Shrines and Priests

Azuran temples and shrines stand throughout the Dragon Empire and beyond, and with more than one shrine per city to allow each sect its own place. The grandest is the Open Temple of Harkesh, a peak-top edifice near the imperial capital. The temple includes 50 colossal pillars holding up an enormous roof over an ivory statue of the four-faced god, but it is otherwise bare. Azuran's temples remain austere despite his follower's massive donations. The second-greatest shrine of Azuran is the Ringing Temple of Qiresh, a cliffside place known for its hurled sacrifices into the Ruby Sea.

The most famous holy site is the Singing Chantry at Sikkim where the air flowing into the structure chimes and whistles, creating the music of the winds. Each of the Winds is said to maintain a sacred shrine at the four corners of the world, but each location is secret and the goal of lifelong pilgrimages for true adherents.

Masks

Masks come easily to followers of Azuran, since some believe that his four faces were once separate godlings. All foreign gods equate to one of the Four Winds, and only the draconic gods are worthy peers to heavenly Azuran. For instance, Azuran devotees claim the storm god Perun is the Northern Wind, and they see a strong link between Horus and the Southern Wind, and others see a connection to Nuberu the Cloud Master, a god among the giants.

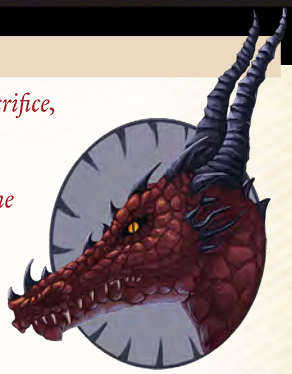
Other Faiths

Azuran is cordial with Baal and Seggotan, because air feeds flames and can also carry rainclouds far across the earth. Azuran pities Khespotan and his antagonistic followers, for that lesser being must be forever earthbound and limited by rigid fate.

What Azuran Demands

Trust the Winds and they will shower you with fortune and victory. Breathe deep the air, travel far and wide to discover the world, and tell your tales to all who listen. Silence is no virtue. Walk the world as the Winds walk above it, proud, bold, and swift. Your voice belongs to Azuran and you must return it after your final breath, well used. Store up wonders and stories worthy of the telling. Speak well when you must speak, and sing at dawn and dusk. Gamble, preach, and tell others of the strength of the True Wind.

Baal



Lord of Fire and Master of Noble Sacrifice, King of All Dragons, Guardian of the Sultan, Lord of Soldiers, Scarlet Protector of the Innocent, the Supreme Fire Dragon, and Patron of the Empire and Dragonkin

Divine Domains: Dragon, Forge, Justice

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapon: Longsword

Cloaked in smoke, fire, and incense, hugely fond of gold, blood, and jewels, and the favored patron god of dragonkin everywhere, Baal is a figure of celebration, raucous festivals, and powerful impulses of noble sacrifice and even martyrdom in the cause of Mharoti conquest and glory. The jaws of Baal are huge and fanged, and—as his scriptures frequently repeat—"fires must be fed." All his worshippers make sacrifices of gold and jewels, and most of all the sultan, who is believed to be under Baal's special protection.

The god is sometimes male and sometimes female, matching the ruling sultan or sultana, but always resembles a red-orange dragon with golden teeth, eyes, claws, and horns, and black wings streaked with green and gold. The current incarnation of Baal's visage is male, though many of his followers still use the female form from recent habit.

Worshippers

The Mharoti are the devoted followers of Baal, and they consider it an honor to have a son or daughter join the priesthood. Dragonkin make up the majority of his devotees, but humans and even some gnolls are fond of Baal's extravagant confidence and sure protection. Baal watches over more than the sultan: he also protects every hearth in the empire, every child is his child, and every lantern, candle, or torch burns through his divine will.

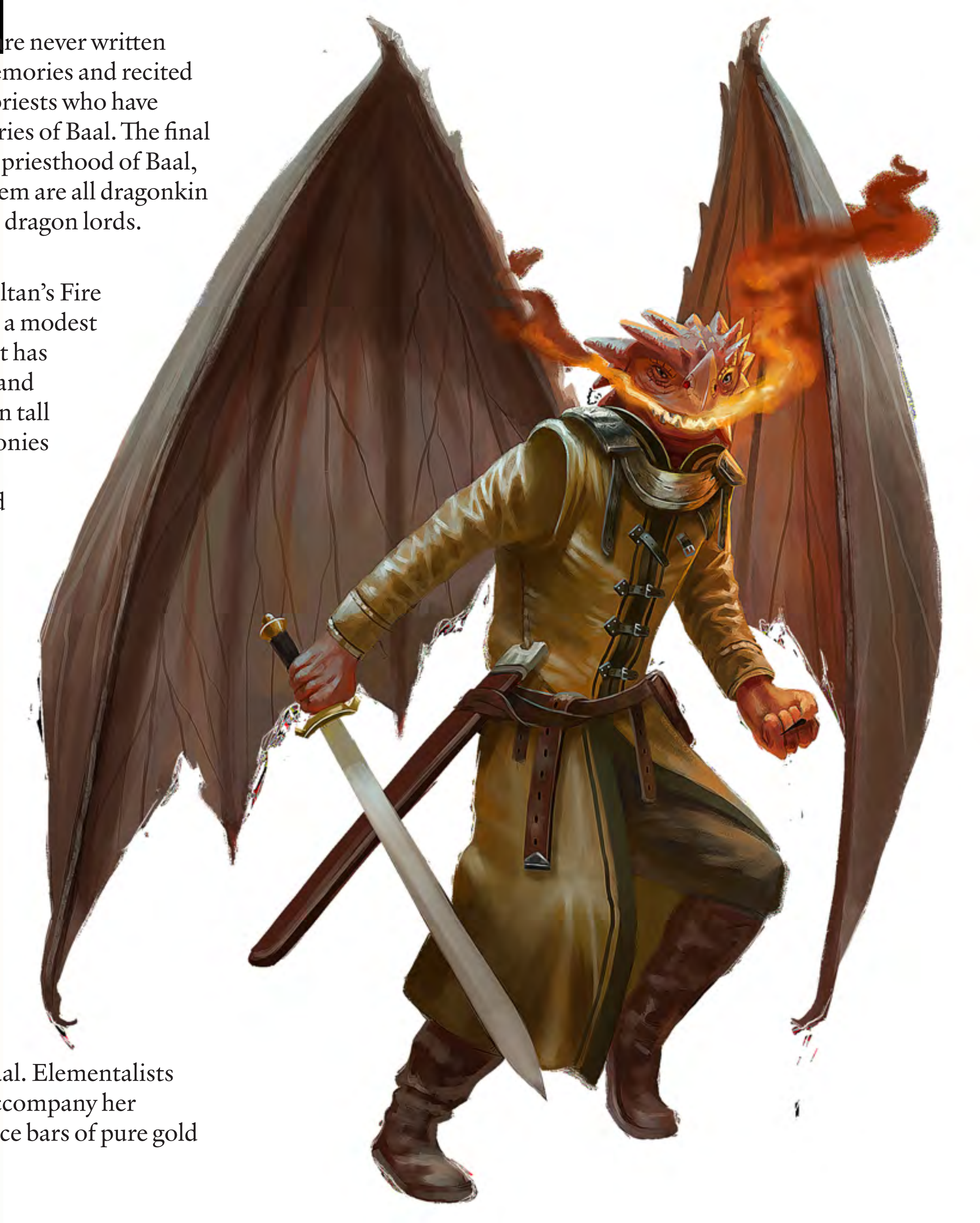
Professional mourners and funeral attendants are also his followers, as are all the titled nobles of the Mharoti, for Baal protects authority and the divine rights of draconic ruling class. In that vein, all true dragons and most drakes worship Baal as their patron and protector.

Thirty or 40 orders of cavaliers, paladins, wizards, and priestly warriors revere Baal, from the Golden Lanterns of Harkesh (an order of fire wizards) to the Humble Knights of Searing Truth (zealous paladins). Thieves, merchants, dwarves, necromancers, and scribes are all banned from his temples.

Symbols and Books

Baal's symbols are a horned dragon head and a leaping flame (rarely combined). His priests wear red, gold, black, and orange.

The teachings of the Lord of Fire are never written down, but instead are held in the memories and recited daily by the Baal-Shek, the learned priests who have memorized all 444 of the sacred stories of Baal. The final 44 of these are secrets unique to the priesthood of Baal, and it is said that those who learn them are all dragonkin who were raised from infancy by the dragon lords.



Shrines and Priests

The greatest temple of Baal is the Sultan's Fire Shrine, which might once have been a modest chapel for the sultan's private use but has since been decorated, ornamented, and expanded over the years with a dozen tall towers (set with jewels on their balconies and bell towers, to catch the light) and with a ceiling of pure hammered gold. Even dragons grow silent when first entering Baal's sacred precincts. Also justly famous is the Shimmering Temple in the province of Kalpostan, the heartland of the Mharoti Empire.

The priests of Baal are the empire's tax collectors, its front-line paladins and martyrs, and its financiers, for the Counting House of Baal is also the Sultan's Treasury. The coin given to the priests of Baal is both a sacred obligation and a payment for the betterment of empire. Who could refuse to give the dragon his due?

Hasibe al-Harkeshi serves as the current chief of the priesthood of Baal. Elementalists and tophet guards and attendants accompany her everywhere, and she is said to sacrifice bars of pure gold to the god each week.

Masks

Some believe Baal is a mask of Aten, Chernobog, Khors, Loki, or possibly even Volund, but this is blasphemy within the precincts of the Dragon Empire. In practice, the god of fire has many children (as the Mharoti have it), and dozens of local fire-saints, fire demigods, and even flame dragons are referred to as Sons and Daughters of Baal.

Other Faiths

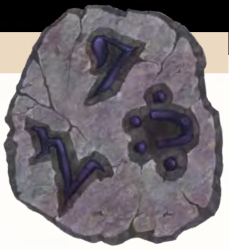
Baal finds the slow rhythm and washing tides of Seggotan tedious, and the Fire Lord is a more active god than the other three elemental lords. Baal despises most human gods, especially the ancient and weak Southern gods as well as the vile gods of the Crossroads, schemers and tricksters such as Volund and Rava.

The greater rivalry, though, is with Khespotan over the proper treatment of souls and earthly remains. Baal favors cremation for the dead and Khespotan favors burial, and the two priesthoods fight street battles over the right to officiate at the funerary rites of major officials. Baal's priests are quick to point out that all drakes and dragons insist on cremation.

What Baal Demands

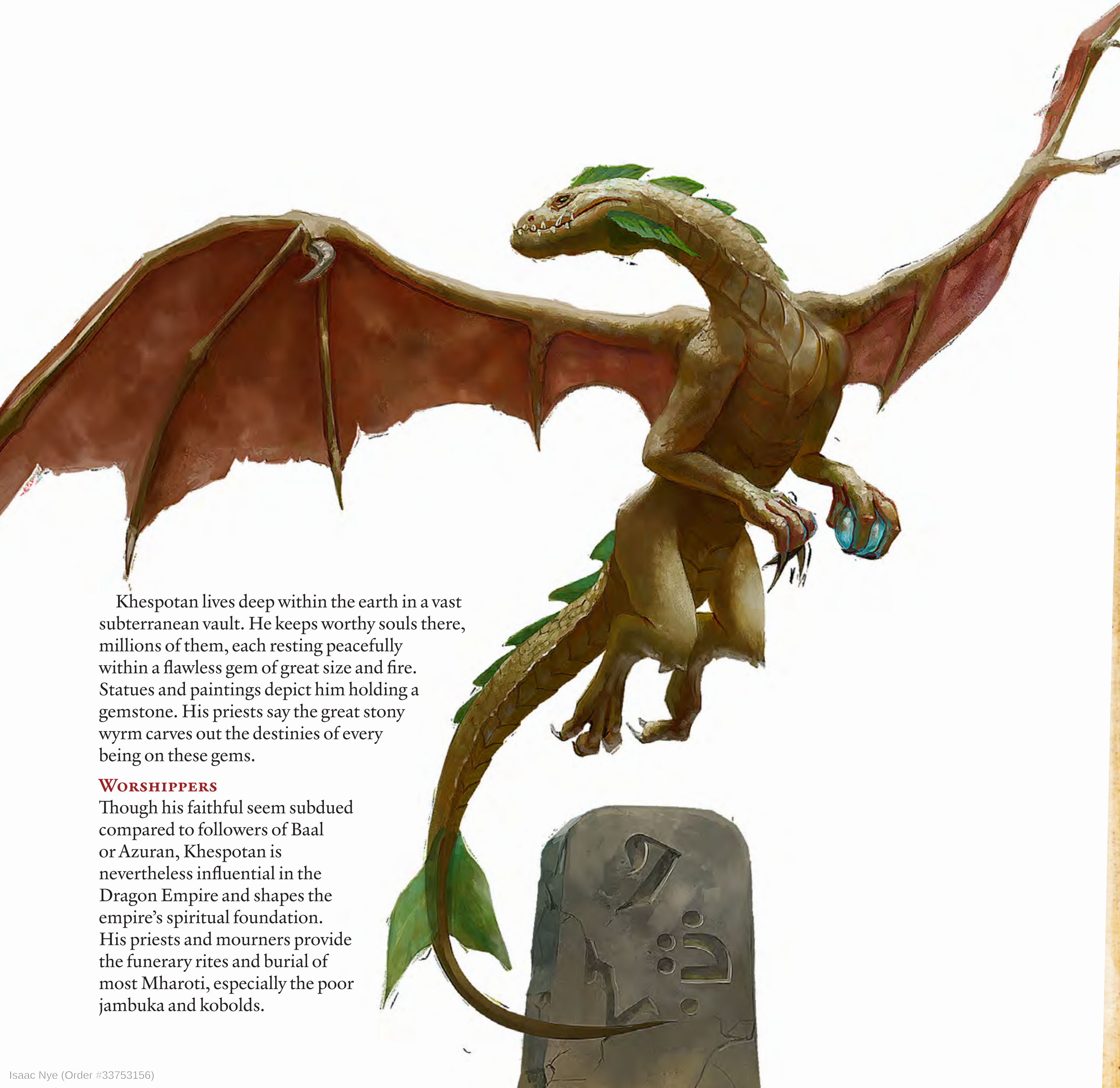
Sacrifice gold, blood, and treasure to the dragon masters. Pray before a fire every day, and burn fat, meat, paper, and incense in his name. Avoid water; never swim or sail if you can walk or fly. Rage is a righteous and proper form of worship, but protect the innocent, unless their hour of sacrifice is at hand. Never write down the lessons of Baal, but keep them pure in your heart.

KHESPOTAN



Lord of Stone, Decider of Destiny, Scrivener of Fate, Keeper of the Vault of Souls, the Earthen Emperor, Divine Minister of Gold and Jewels, Dragon Lord of Certainty

Divine Domains: Knowledge, Mountain, Prophecy



Khespotan lives deep within the earth in a vast subterranean vault. He keeps worthy souls there, millions of them, each resting peacefully within a flawless gem of great size and fire. Statues and paintings depict him holding a gemstone. His priests say the great stony wyrm carves out the destinies of every being on these gems.

WORSHIPPERS

Though his faithful seem subdued compared to followers of Baal or Azuran, Khespotan is nevertheless influential in the Dragon Empire and shapes the empire's spiritual foundation. His priests and mourners provide the funerary rites and burial of most Mharoti, especially the poor jambuka and kobolds.

Builders revere the Lord of Stone and Destiny and ask him to help their works withstand the ages. Miners seek his blessing for safe passage beneath the earth. The clergy trains architects, scribes, and scholars who design public works and record royal edicts.

In addition, most of the empire's duty-bound army worships Khespotan. In particular, the Silent Sentinels and the Gray Janissaries view their fate as sealed, and thus

Khespotan's holy text the *Tablets of Fate* contains his entire ethos clearly and completely. Some claim major destinies can be deciphered from the tablets. Khespotan's clergy maintains that the only prophecy foretold is that all will one day return to the earth. Splinter groups see deeper knowledge in the tablets.

SHRINES AND PRIESTS

Worshippers dedicate shrines to Khespotan in badlands, mountain peaks, limestone arches, and other distinctive stone features. His larger temples include cemeteries or catacombs. The Seminary of the Stone trains architects, sages, and scribes. Khespotan's most opulent temple is the Golden Cavern, frequented by mining moguls and gem traders. Devotees make offerings to appease the Lord of Stone at the Rift of Zasamra in the Dragoncoil Mountains, where a city was swallowed by the earth. Priests say the city committed a great transgression against patient Khespotan.

Due to their focus on duty and literacy, the priests of Khespotan make up the bulk of the empire's bureaucracy and manage its daily affairs. They include royal archivists, royal scribes, messenger units, and the quartermasters of the army. Khespotanites enjoy the patronage of the merchant class.

MASKS

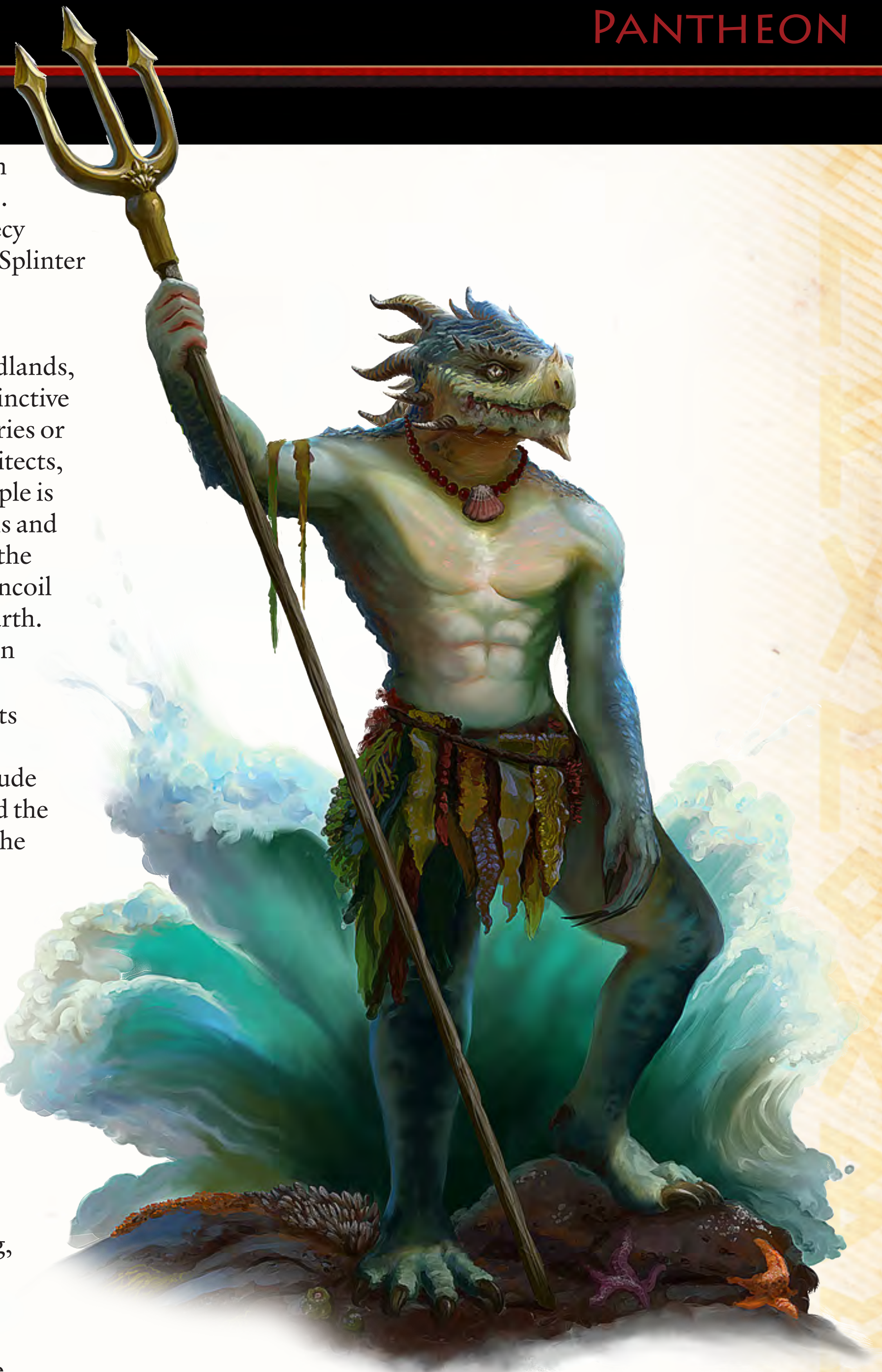
Khespotan makes no effort to hide, and he is what he is. Sects advocating Khespotan as a mask of various foreign deities gain little attention, largely because of Khespotan's deep connections to the empire. The only exception might be Anu-Akma in the Southern lands due to some distant similarities.

OTHER FAITHS

Khespotan leaves the other dragon gods to their squabbling and machinations. Since the beginning, he quietly bears their weight as he does the weight of all. Though Seggotan laps incessantly at stone trying to wear it away, Khespotan knows that stone becomes sand, and that same sand forms the bottom of the sea, containing it. The fickle voice of Azuran can likewise be ignored.

WHAT KHESPOTAN DEMANDS

Every fate is already been set in stone; accept this. Trace your path by following the commandments carved in the Tablets of Fate. Though your fate is unrevealed, proper adherence to the faith will ensure you never stray from the path. Do your duty, endure hardships, continue ever onward. Never complain. When your destiny arrives, you will know. Your destiny will end in the earthen arms of Khespotan.



SEGGOTAN

Lord of the Ocean and Eternity, Keeper of Time, Oathbinder, Counter of the Stars, the Great Water Dragon, Patron of the Sea Drakes, Maritime Overlord, Commander of the Tides

DIVINE DOMAINS: Dragon, Life, Ocean, Tempest

ALIGNMENT: Neutral

FAVORED WEAPON: Trident

Seggotan is an ancient power who claims to have seen the beginning and the end of time. All oaths sworn to Seggotan must be kept, for he never forgets. Mortals might dare to bargain with

Seggotan and his servants, though he fulfills such bargains in mysterious ways or with unintended consequences. Enigmatic and unpredictable, Seggotan holds the sea and all in it as his for eternity. If you have eaten one fish from the sea or taken one step in the surf, Seggotan has claimed you for his own.

Seggotan speaks through his servants, a species of capricious, aquatic shapeshifting sea drakes called the Kyree who can speak with his voice. When he appears he resembles an enormous shadow beneath the surface of the waves. On other occasions, Seggotan appears as a gigantic dragon with two heads, one green and one blue, which speak in perfect unison.

Worshippers

For centuries, most coastal regions favored Seggotan's rival, Nethus. Seggotan was primarily venerated in the Mharoti Empire, and he favored the dragonkin greatly. After Nethus was chained in Kammae Straboli, Seggotan became master of the sea, and his attention shifted to grander ambitions, or perhaps more esoteric issues. His Kyree drakes fell silent.

After the Mharoti navy suffered a string of unusual defeats in skirmishes with Capleon and Triolan navies of the Seven Cities, Mharoti sailors coined the curse, "Spit on Seggotan." Nevertheless, Seggotan is still their official patron and given full respect by the naval officers, who fear spurning the ancient deity and seek to restore his favor.

Symbols and Books

Seggotan is commonly represented as a two-headed serpent, a trident, a loop, or a combination of icons.

Seggotan's wisdom is recorded in verse on sheets of silver foil, called the Song Eternal. Various sects fight for control over these records, and paper drakes and rivals steal some of them. As a result, no clear number or sequence of the Song exists to declare Seggotan's will.

Unknown to all but the highest priests, the sheets are transcribed from ancient Song Pearls Seggotan created. The complete knowledge is dangerous to all creation, so the priests have scattered and hidden the pearls.

Shrines and Priests

The Ageless Spire soars above the Mharoti city of Prezhan and casts its shadow over the seat of Mharoti naval power. A great sacrificial pier extends half a mile from the temple into the sea, and locals make their offerings there. The Mharoti navy executes any recruits who fail to serve the empire adequately.

Outside the Mharoti Empire, shrines to Seggotan rise in coastal towns and seafarers make perfunctory appeals to the god. Only two other regions have sizable, organized priesthoods. The Great Library in Friula contains several foil pieces of the Song Eternal, which have given rise to the Order of Renewal that emphasizes rebirth and eternity over the god's more martial aspects. In Bemmea, a small cult of mages bargains with Seggotan for elemental boons and argue for their interpretation of the god's will. Some believe they have recovered a Song Pearl and wish to unleash its ancient knowledge. The tiny priesthood of Seggotan that had established itself in Capleon, southernmost of the Seven Cities, was driven out of town and its temple destroyed by an angry mob. The faith seems unable to find purchase in human lands.

Masks

Seggotan is. He wears no other masks in organized faiths, though he answers the call of animists who worship the sea, as well as druids devoted to the ocean. The sea whispers his name to those who do not yet know it.

Many clerics believe the four lesser gods who were once Seggotan's rivals have become his heralds or servants: Aegir, Njord, Nodens, Lir, and Tefnut—these are now Seggotan's names. Some believe that now that Nethus is free, he stands as Seggotan's last rival, the only remaining sea god not yet absorbed into Seggotan's tides.

Other Faiths

Seggotan pays little attention to other faiths, though Mavros and Perun claim the title of storm lord and this irks Seggotan. Storms come from the sea, and the title is rightfully his. Mavros and his followers must drown. Likewise, Baal's arrogance must sometimes be humbled. Few other gods concern him overmuch.

What Seggotan Demands

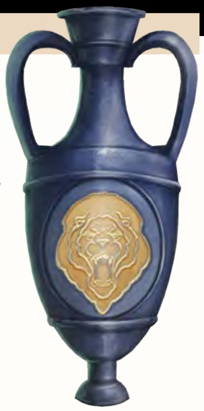
Sacrifice gold, jewels, and blood to the sea. Uphold any oaths sworn to him. Drop a coin into the sea each time you enter the sea, or prick your finger for a drop of blood. Light no fires, and watch the stars. Never fail to bathe when water is near. Seggotan rewards the victorious, those who send their enemies' ships and treasure to a watery grave. Seggotan is most pleased with deaths by drowning.

ELVEN GODS

The gods of the elves are scattered and failing , turning to darkness, their temples often quarried for stone to build more practical structures, their priests few and widely ignored. Some like Kamrusepa, the goddess of dawn, are known only among a few scattered tribes in the east, their teachings all but lost; others like Sarastra still hold great power in the Shadow Realm. Though most are much lessened from their glory days, their power was once great, and their remaining adherents are often extremely powerful, with command of magic, sword, and diplomacy.

In recent years, their shrines seem to have grown slightly in power, and at a few the faithful gather in small numbers on the holiest days. The pantheon remains a thin and watery version of what was once an enormous faith, though Yarila and Porevit and Holda remain strong in Dornig. Baccho, once thought entirely dead, has regrown a bit like leaves from the grape vine, in spring.

BACCHO (BACCHOLON)



God of Poetry, Lord of Wine, Master of Revels, Golden Words, and Charming Courtesies, King of Lust and Chaos, Warden of Shadow Roads, Lion Lord of Shapeshifters, Keeper of Prophecies, God of the Third Eye, Patron of the Nymphs and Satyrs

Divine Domains: Beer (called Wine), Death, Lust, Prophecy, Travel

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapons: Shortbow

Baccho was once the Prince of Courtesies and Master of the Elves, their patron and paragon. When the elves left Midgard and returned to the Summer Lands, he led the procession in person, flowers in his hair and a song on his lips. His human and elfmarked followers fell into a long despair, filled with bouts of madness and drunkenness and bitter wrath. His temples fell into disuse or were reconsecrated to Ninkash or Charun or other gods. Baccho's echo is still felt, his poetic hymns and joyous image carved in old elven halls and buildings, but his priests are vanishingly few and often not notably different from beggars and starving poets. A few of his order remember the heights of elven ritual magic, but this could be mere speculation or wishful dreaming—something Baccho's followers have always been prone to.

Worshippers

Baccholon's few yet vivid worshippers include debauched followings among certain noble houses, young poets, vintners, seers, and shapeshifters. Oddly enough, he has a small following among the dwarves, ravenfolk, satyrs, and bearfolk, especially among bear-shifters, wolf-reavers, and doom croakers, who consider him a patron martyr for shifters and seers.

Symbols and Books

Baccholon's sacred books are many and contradictory. Charges of heresy and false prophecy divide his followers into competing groups.

His symbol is an amphora of blue-green faience, and sometimes a roaring lion.

Shrines and Priests

Baccholon's shrines were once ubiquitous, with the greatest being the (now-ruined) Shrine of Purple Revels in Hirschberg. Wine shops and vintners keep small statues of him, as do some courtiers in the Arbonesse and poets in Salzbach, Perunalia, and Valera. The Golden Temple of Baccho in Valera is now the city's wool and cloth market, though its crypts still clasp the remains of generations of high priests of the Laughing Prince.

TABLE 12–4: MAJOR GODS OF THE ELVES

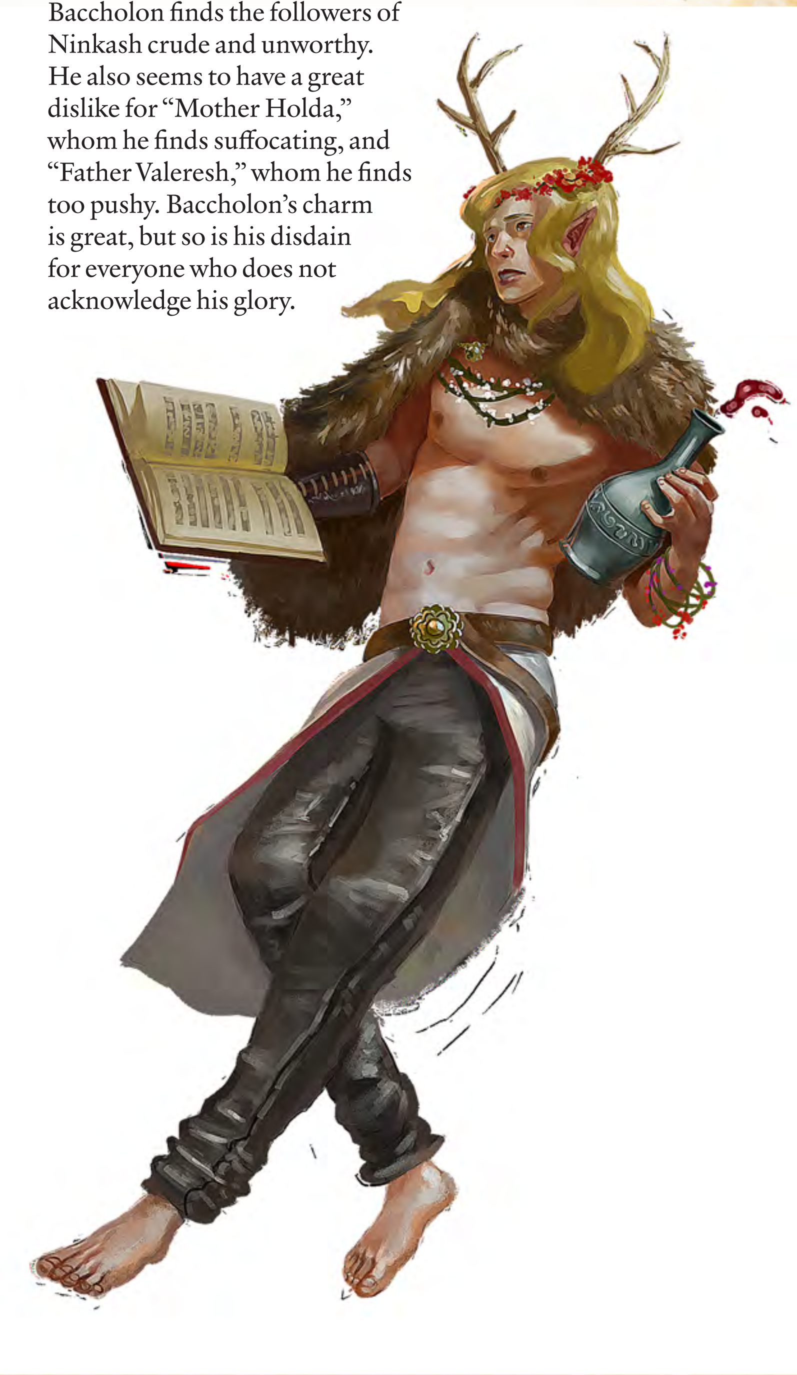
Name	Typical Worshippers
Baccho	Poets, lovers, the young, seers
Holda	Mothers, fathers, weavers
Sarastra	Wizards, nobles, scholars
Valeresh	Warriors, archers, rulers
Yarila and Porevit	Druids, farmers, shepherds

Masks

Baccholon is sometimes associated with Loki, Bastet, or Azuran, though these connections are tenuous at best. Others believe that Baccho has been corrupted and is a mask of a dark goddess, the Goat of the Woods.

Other Faiths

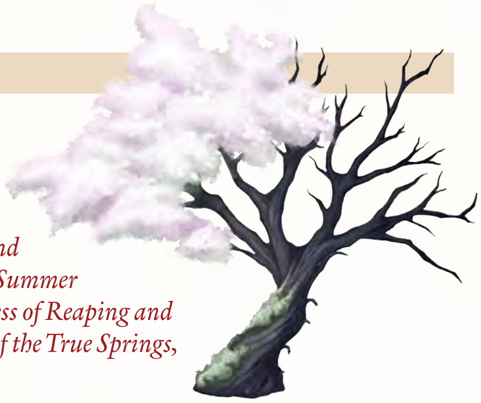
Baccholon finds the followers of Ninkash crude and unworthy. He also seems to have a great dislike for "Mother Holda," whom he finds suffocating, and "Father Valeresh," whom he finds too pushy. Baccholon's charm is great, but so is his disdain for everyone who does not acknowledge his glory.



What Baccholon Demands

Make art, and celebrate life to the fullest. Leave no stone unturned and unpainted. Rage, love, and make your mark on all things. Embrace the dragon and the lamb; both are your children.

Holda



Goddess of Hearth and Seasons, Queen of the Arbonesse, Mother of Yarila and Porevit, Keeper of Summer and Winter, Goddess of Reaping and Spinning, Keeper of the True Springs, Harvest Goddess

Divine Domains: Life, Light, Tempest

Alignment: Neutral Good

Favored Weapon: Staff

The mother goddess of the elves rules the seasons, the hearth, and the harvest. All the world was hers, and her children, Yarila and Porevit, kept watch over the world's animals and growing things. As a goddess of home and seasons, her followers created elven cloth and cloaks; this tradition faded with the change to a human and elfmarked priesthood, but her followers still exper weave astonishingly colorful, silky garments, often through with threads of gold and mithral. Wind, w and thunder are hers to command, as are light and Holda's demeanor is always gentle, but her standar for craft, creation, and children are all very high. H followers find great sin in sloth and idleness.

Worshippers

Holda's worshippers are quiet but powerful, embo the opposite of Baccholon's revelries and Valeresh' boasts and honor. They tend to be older men and w in positions of quiet power: guild leaders, mayors, landholders, ley line wielders, and scholars of stead temperament. While they rarely make a fuss, when do, the words of followers of Holda are always acco great weight.

Symbols and Books

The only sacred book of Holda's faith is the Book o Seasons, which some believe exists in many versio Certainly no two of them are exactly alike, and ma trace out ley lines and describe elements of everyda and elements of great magical power, ley wells and sometimes long turned to dust.

Her symbol is a tree bare on one side, and in full flower on the other.

Shrines and Priests

Holda's temples are built on or directly next to ley wells or springs, the places where trickles of ley line energy first appear.

Masks

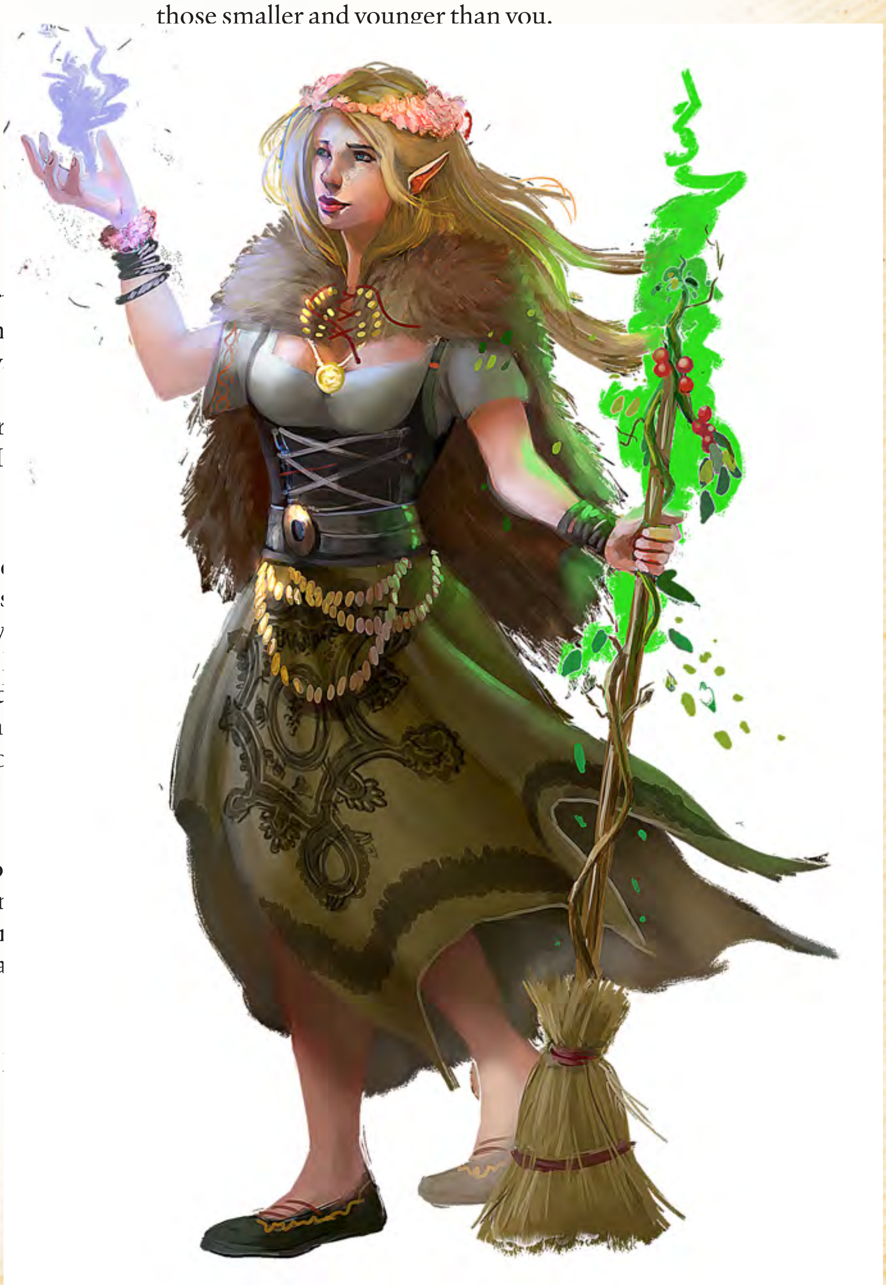
Holda is often regarded as an ancient form of Lada or Khors, and sometimes as not the mother of Yarila and Porevit but the same goddess, unified.

Other Faiths

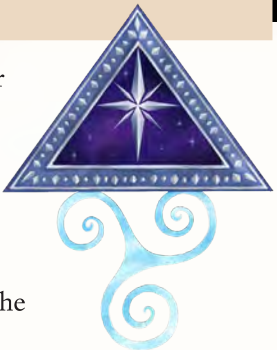
The followers of Holda and Sarastra are almost always at odds, except when the elves and their subjects are threatened. Followers of Yarila and Porevit generally defer to Mother Holda.

What Holda Demands

Defend your home, and give comfort to the weak and the desperate. Shelter children, watch the seasons, and know when the time has come to join the ancestors. Respect your elders and keep your word always, especially to those smaller and younger than you.



SARASTRA



Goddess of Night and Magic, Her Celestial Majesty Sarastra Aestruum, Queen of Night and Magic, Duchess of the Heavens, Countess of Thorn, Mistress of Air and Darkness, Lady of the Summer Palace and Bride of Shadow, Patron of the Shadow Fey

Divine Domains: Darkness, Knowledge, Labyrinth, Trickery

Alignment: Neutral

Favored Weapons: Rapier, dagger

Sarastra rules the Shadow Realm, the source of darkness and raw arcane energies. Her goals are oblique and mysterious, often cruel and heartless, and this is reflected in her favorite followers, the shadow fey who make her realm home. She plots out of boredom and malice, and her mastery of the arcane and her control of deceptions and misdirection both make her dangerous. She has a perfect memory for the slightest insult, and some of her revenges take centuries to complete.

Sarastra resembles an impossibly beautiful shadow fey woman wearing an indigo dress covered with diamonds and a diadem of mithral and glowing starstones. Her cloak seems part of the night. In the Realm of Shadow her avatar presides directly over the Courts of the Shadow Fey. Her attention is dangerous but can bring great reward to those who please her—a difficult prospect given her mercurial moods. She creates complex rules and protocols for her court, and she changes them with every whim. She recruits many pawns to use against her enemies.

Worshippers

Shadow fey, elves, and the elfmarked are Sarastra's primary followers, although her devotees include human and tiefling arcanists. Pockets of Sarastran worship also exist in Friula, the Maritime Republic of Triolo, and the Free City of Zobeck. Her worship is banned in many areas, particularly among those who favor rival gods of magic such as Khors, Hecate, or Thoth-Hermes.

Symbols and Books

Sarastra's symbol is a stylized star inside a triangle above three whorls of air. Her most holy book is titled The Mistress of Air and Darkness, a book of confusing tales that worshippers use to attempt to decipher her desires.

Shrines and Priests

Sarastra's shrines are common in elven lands and shared with other shadow gods. They are dark structures illuminated by glinting silver offerings. Sarastran shrines feature an entry room partly open to the sky, the moon window or moon gate.

An elven pair currently leads her greatest temple in Midgard at the River Court of the Arbonesse: Laurin Marcen (CN female elf cleric 11 [Sarastra]) and Genessa (NG female elf bard 11). The two have expanded her worship in the Arbonesse and the Grand Duchy of Dornig, somewhat to the discomfit of its rulers.

Masks

Sarastra takes on many forms in the mortal realm. In addition to her favored form as a shadow fey, she might take the form of wind and shadow, white deer, ravens, and owls to advise the lost or teach magic. She appears as a pale maiden to tempt chivalrous knights into abandoning their orders and wasting away in pursuit of her.

Despite their similar domains and mutual animosity between their followers, Sarastra and Hecate never acknowledge each other in any manner. Some believe they are the same deity, an assertion their followers deny.

She is called Heid or Gullveig in the North, and Hecate and even Charun have been suggested as masks of Sarastra in the south.

Other Faiths

Sarastra counts many deities as rivals or enemies. She has clashed with Charun and Wotan. Her relationship with Thoth-Hermes is more complex, but they are generally rivals. She also competes with other fey deities, such as Yarila and Porevit, for attention from the elves.

Sarastra's primary ally is the Hunter, in his asp
Moonlit King. They are lovers, passionate thoug
estranged.

What Sarastra Demands

Walk the world and understand its magic. Cele
beauty, mystery and magic. Enchantment, illus
deceit are worthy weapons; learn them. Let no
of beauty perish thoughtlessly. Follow your pa
without regard for how you might be judged.
laws of men. Sacrifice blood and magic to the
by night, and reap your rewards each day.

Valeresh

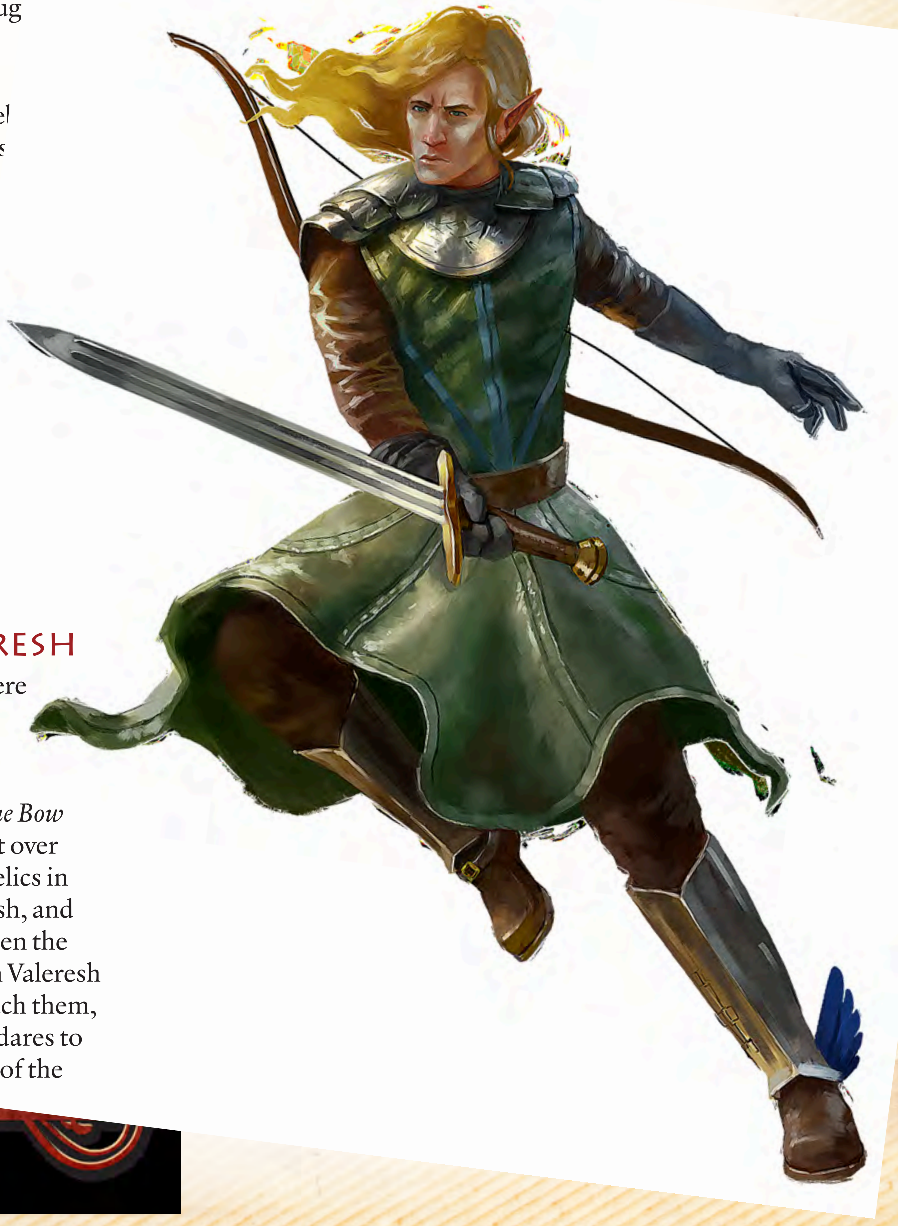
Supreme Archer, Lord of the Battlefield, Master of Sword and Arrow, Swift Destroyer and God of Battle, Patron of the Elves

Divine Domains: Death, Justice, Speed, Tempest, War

Alignment: Neutral Good

Favored Weapons: Longsword, longbow

Swift and sure in battle, devoted to justice in peace, Valeresh is the elven king of the gods, his wife long dead and mourned. This wound to his heart explains his stern mien and his ruthless destruction of creatures of evil, darkness, madness, and foul magic. When the elves ruled a great realm, his following was vast. However, his priesthood led the Great Retreat, so almost nothing remains of the liturgy, temples, and sacred rites of Valeresh except a handful of extremely
weapons.



Great Weapons of Valeresh

All weapons of the priesthood of Valeresh were enchanted in some way, but a few stand out. Foremost among them are *Illethandril* (more commonly the *Silent Sword of Valeresh*) and *Korren-Gadresh* (more commonly the *True Bow of Valeresh*, or the *Farseeing Bow*), said to shoot over hills and through walls. The pair remain as relics in Hirschberg in the Echoing Temple of Valeresh, and it is said they will only be picked up again when the elves return to reclaim their empire, or when Valeresh comes to slay some great evil. None dare touch them, for they destroy any unworthy creature that dares to lift them without being bound to the service of the elves.

Worshippers

Long ago, elven soldiers, officers, nobles, and merchants worshipped Valeresh as the embodiment of their empire and the keeper of peace. Now, only a handful of elfmarked in the Grand Duchy and a small contingent of humans in the Seven Cities remember him and keep the feast days. The god essentially departed Midgard with the Great Retreat.

Symbols and Books

Valeresh had two sacred tomes: the Book of the Silent Sword and the Arrow of Truth. The first was a treatise on stoic and honorable life, while the second spoke in parables and stories about how to rule and maintain the Valeran Empire of the elves, with fair attention given to such matters as raising archer levies, supplying sufficient arrows to a battlefield, and matters of taxation, granaries, and justice. Few copies of either work remain; the books were decorated with elaborate gem-studded covers, and their pages so richly illuminated and embellished that they were among the first treasures plundered when their empire fell.

His symbol is a fine elven bow tipped with red and gold.

Shrines and Priests

The greatest temple of Valeresh is the Cathedral of Bright Honor on a hill just outside Valera, the city named for his glorious reign among the mortal world. It is a stark and empty place where only the emperor and his closest advisers gather, seeking some guidance from the ancient power. From time to time, a golden light appears on its altar and speaks in Elvish to those present.

Masks

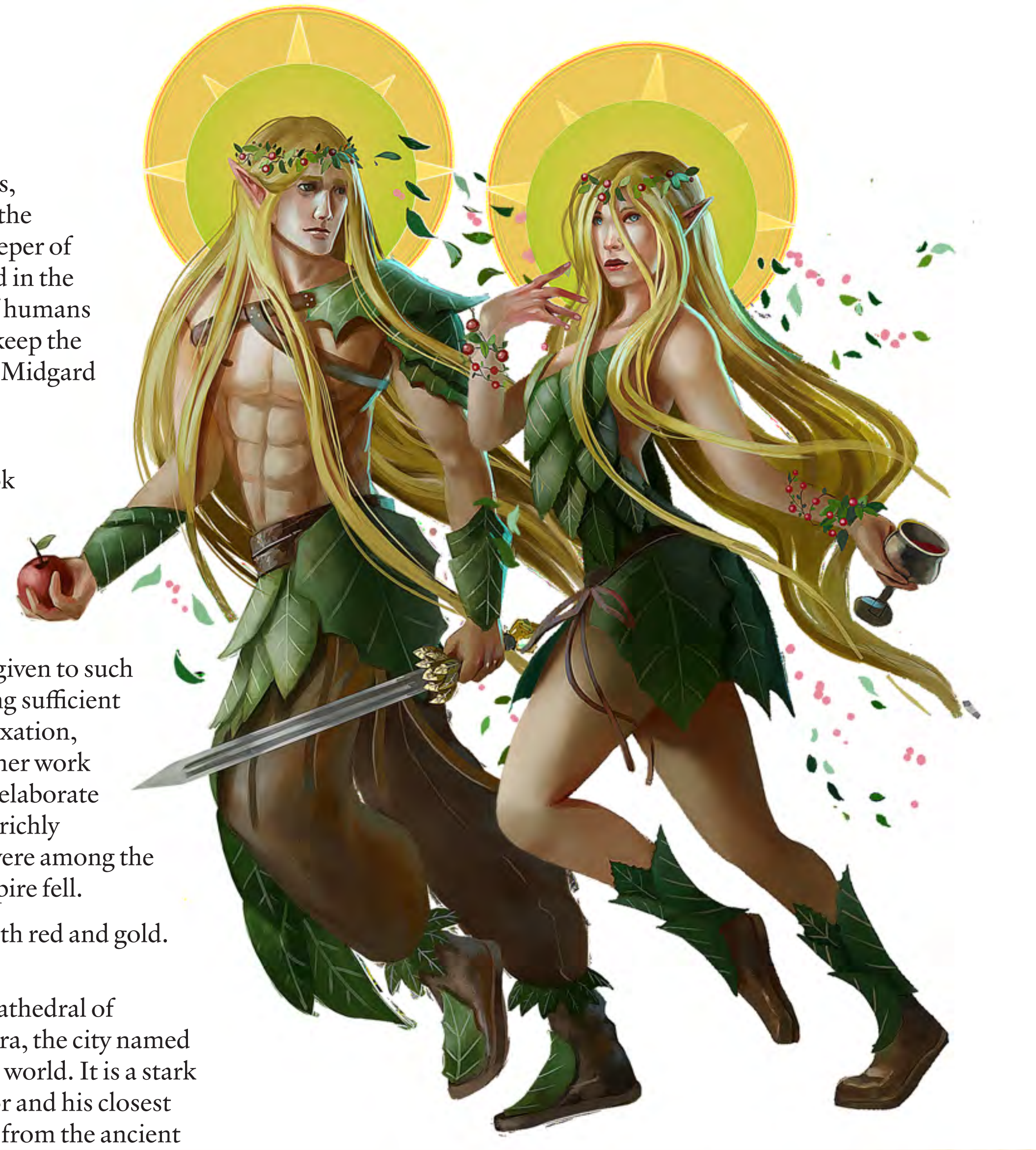
Valeresh is widely assumed to be the elven mask of Thor, Perun, and Mavros. A few claim Valeresh is a male and elven form of Sif.

Other Faiths

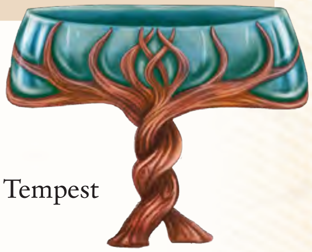
Valeresh was always on great terms with Holda and Yarila, though the two female goddesses were each jealous of their time with the Archer God. Baccholon was Valeresh's fool and also the only god who could tell Valeresh when he was deeply wrong.

What Valersh Demands

Fight evil and defend the elves. Protect the innocent, and strike down a foe swiftly and without cruelty.



Yarila and Porevit



The Green Gods, Father Forest and Mother Field, the Fair Gods, the Keepers of Sowing and Harvest, Gods of Fertility, Forests, and Wine

Divine Domains: Life, Nature, Tempest

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Favored Weapons: Bow, sickle

Among the most complicated of gods and goddesses is Porevit, the forest god of harvest, wine, and greenery, who is also the goddess Yarila during the spring planting and even sometimes invoked as the goddess Kostroma the earth mother, slain in the God Wars long ago. The mystery of how one god carries so many forms, names, and genders is best left to the druids and field priests, who prepare the sacrifices to Yarila and Porevit. Most followers think of them as two divine masks that are publicly known rather than hidden. As deities both wild and tame, both growing and harvested, all living things belong to the Green Gods, especially all plants, trees, and crops but also springs, metal tools, and the turning of the seasons.

Porevit is a tall man with green hair and a simple covering of leaves, depicted with a spear or grapes in hand, sometimes with a handful of knives. Yarila appears as a blond or white-haired elf maiden holding flowers and with one hand casting seeds or holding a planting stick; her feet are always bare. When to call on Yarila and when to call on Porevit is a mystery known only the Green Gods' priests, as well as the peasants who rely on their blessings.

Worshippers

Elves, the elfmarked, bearfolk, peasants, farmers, hunters, vintners, and even woodcutters are all followers of Yarila and Porevit, seeking their blessings for crops and for forests. The faith flourishes from the Grand Duchy of Dornig to Krakovar, as well as in Zobeck, the Northlands, and the Magdar Kingdom.

Symbols and Books

Yarila and Porevit have few sacred books; the primary one is the Coming of the Green Gods. It alternates druidic wisdom with strange revelations and proscriptions against the eating of certain animals at certain times. Most find it indecipherable.

The rites of Yarila and Porevit involve food, wine, or green wood burnt to smoke, and extend for a full day. Summer and winter solstices are especially sacred times, with symbolic human sacrifices buried in the fields at midsummer and figures made of straw set ablaze to bring back the sun at midwinter.

Shrines and Priests

Followers build shrines to Yarila and Porevit at the edge of fields or in shallow caverns, especially those containing springs or rivers. The largest stone temple of the faith is the Twinned Cathedral in Reywald in the Grand Duchy.

The greatest priest of Yarila and Porevit is the Saintmistress Rowanmantle, the Abbess of the Twinned Cathedral and confidant of the Imperatrix. The faith of Yarila and Porevit is especially strong along the border of the Arbonesse; within the elven forest, the faith takes an entirely elven turn, with stranger rites and greater magic.

The current high priest of Yarila and Porevit in Perunalia is Ogolai Kiyat, an elderly centaur who wandered in from the Rothenian Plain one winter, first to Zobeck, then to Sephaya, always happy to share a meal or perform a benediction. His profound wisdom and his unusual race seems to confirm the dual nature of his god to the pious followers he guides in worship.

Masks

Yarila and Porevit are widely believed to be masks of Freyr and Freyja, Nun and Naunet in the South, and possibly for Baccho, the god of wine.

More complex is their relationship to an elemental deity called the Green God, a silent two-faced figure whom elves revered through offerings of flowers and honey in summer, and blood and hair in winter. The elven records on the Green God are contradictory; he might have been Yarila and Porevit's father. Other traditions indicate that the god was a dual divinity, but over time the two halves became separate figures now called Yarila and Porevit. The nature, existence, and meaning of this divine parthogenesis was a thorny one in elven theology, bound up with high elven ritual magic.

Other Faiths

Yarila and Porevit are on good terms with the Northern gods and with the gods of the Crossroads, and eternal enemies of the Southern gods and the Dragon gods. They sustain a special loathing of Marena, the blood goddess of Morgau, and oppose her at every turn.

What Yarila and Porevit Demand

More than respect for the wild and growing things, the green gods' mysteries demand that one frequently abstain from meat, plant as often as reap, and be fruitful, drunken, and generous on high holy days. Worshippers must provide alms if asked. Male followers of Porevit must participate in the harvest, while Yarila's female followers must participate in the spring planting. Never fail to celebrate the solstice, and never refuse food and drink to a guest.

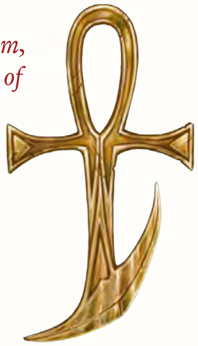
SOUTHERN GODS

Far more ancient than the Dragon Empire's mysteries, hundreds of gods are known by name in the South, most of little consequence. But a few of the great Southern gods have expanded their followings deep beyond the Southern desert, or north into the wet, dark woods. The gods of the South are not creatures of draconic enigma or bloody reaving and wenching. Instead, they are creatures of finely honed knowledge, of perfect ritual, of the true and proper understanding of this life and the next.

The Southern gods are deep and wise and treacherous and never to be underestimated. Their faiths are millennia old. They have risen above the fray of a hundred petty city-gods. They stand implacable and firm in the face of time, chaos, and decay, eternal and unyielding.

At the same time, the peculiar Southern gods have animal heads and walk among their worshippers, pleased to sleep in their temples and terrify their priesthoods on occasion. The Southern gods are happy to meddle and happy to remain wildly inhuman, both cruel and kind. For all that their people love them, for Nuria Natal remains the oldest kingdom of Midgard, able to view all younger realms with a certain wry disdainfulness. The ancient gods of the realm make it so.

ANU-AKMA (ANUBIS, HADES, HEL)



God of the Underworld, Judge of the Dead and Guardian of Tombs, Guide of the People of Khem, Purifier of Souls, Preserver of the Worthy, King of Jackals and Patron of the Gnolls and Ghouls

Divine Domains: Death, Justice, Travel

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapon: Flail, scythe

Among the golden sands of the Southern deserts, Anu-Akma guards the tombs of royalty and stands against the scourges of age, madness, and the evil undead. Deep underground, his worship as Akma-Apophis takes a darker turn, combined with the rites of a devil he conquered long ago. There he is venerated as the greatest patron of the Ghoul Imperium and Lord of the Underworld.

Everywhere except in the Greater Duchy of Morgau, Anu-Akma promotes purity and preserves order, watchi over the timely and dignified death of all. His priests anoint those of royal blood to rise again as mummies or liches, and gnoll mortuary guards and guides protect the vast ossuaries and cemeteries from desecration.

His ghoulish followers, meanwhile, await each burial as a new source of flesh for feasting, while Anu-Akma preserves the souls of those unfortunate corpses.

When portrayed by humans and desert folk, Anu-Akn is a tall and muscular jackal-headed man whose flesh seems made of the starry night sky. His eyes are golden, and he wears the garb of Southland royalty. Beneath the dunes, his images portray a faceless darkness beneath heavy robes and mummy wrappings. He holds his arms wide, welcoming all into his cold domain.

Worshippers

Anu-Akma is worshipped by the humans of the Souther royal dynasties—especially the elderly and ill, hoping for an easy journey to the afterlife in the hands of holy gnoll guides. The gnolls of the South, and the ghouls anc darakhul under the earth, also follow Anu-Akma faithful

Symbols and Books

Anu-Akma's symbols are a golden ankh and a golden scythe. In some cases, the scythe blade is curved inward, and the handles are placed so that the scythe resembles an ankh. Other symbols include the vulture, three huma skulls, or a human skull with golden ankhs painted arou its eye sockets.

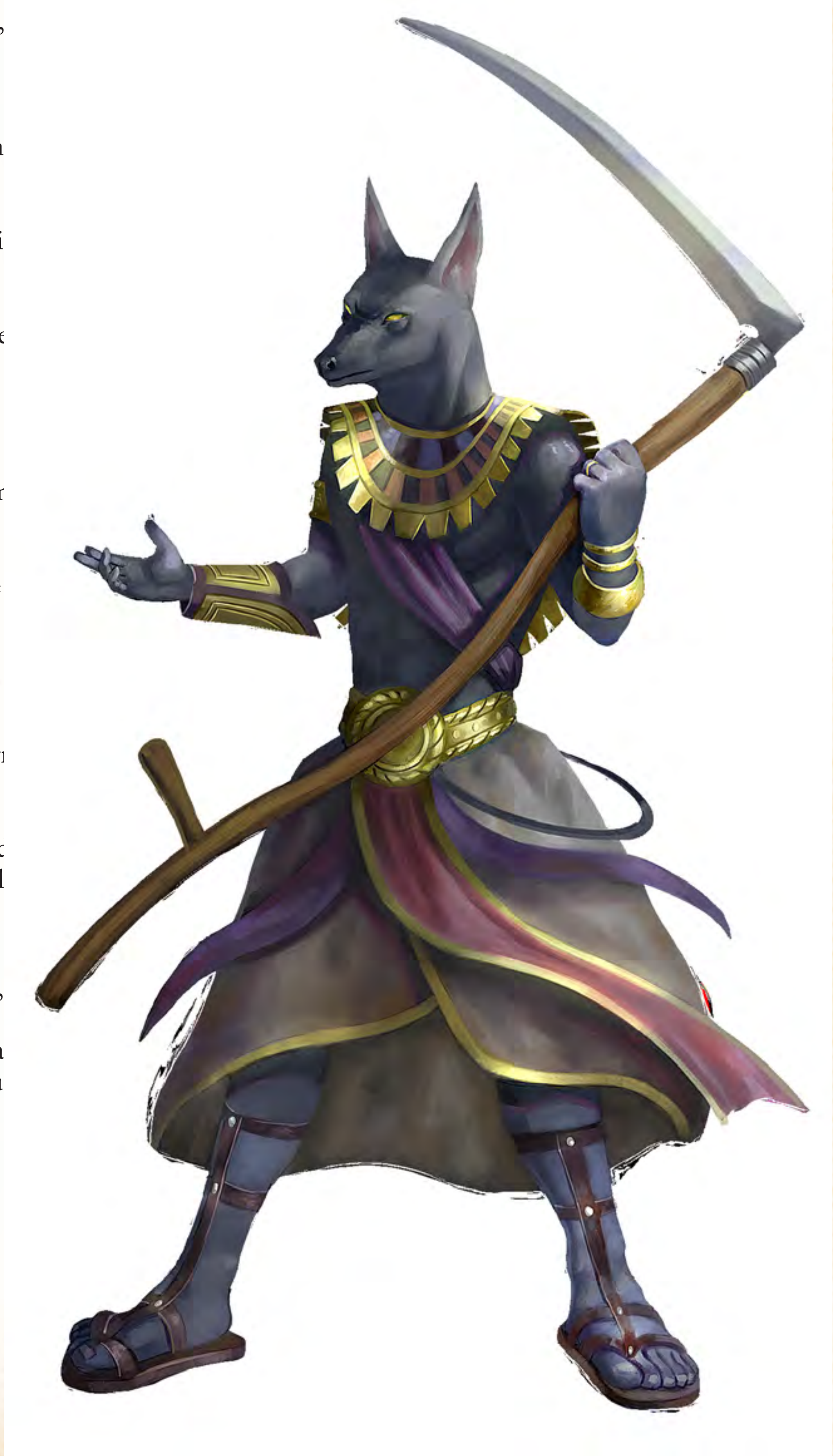
His most famous holy text is The Preservation of Bodies and Migration of Souls. The funerary wrappings Anu-Akma's high priests include the complete text.

Shrines and Priests

In the Southlands, Anubis's temples are warm, small, and comfortable for the elderly and infirm. Divinations tell his followers when death approaches, and they are

TABLE 12–5: MAJOR GODS OF THE SOUTH

Name	Typical Worshippers
Anu-Akma	The elderly, ghouls, gnolls
Aten	Humans, dwarves, Saph-Saph
Heretical Aten	Humans, gnolls, blood mages, diabolists
Bastet	Alchemists, dancers, gnolls, soldiers
Horus	Nomads, heruti, Natalese
Ninkash	Dwarves, brewers, farmers
Thoth-Hermes	Scholars, scribes, thieves, wizards



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strong for their journey into the underworld. These temples are adjacent to massive pyramids and guarded against the unclean ghouls that whisper lies and horrors to the faithful.

Small shrines, often just a few well-guarded rooms or caverns, are common in the caves that Southern gnoll tribes use to access the underworld. Those tribes give thanks and prepare to delve deeper or trade with denizens of the underworld. No undead may pass to the surface through these caverns.

Massive temples in the Ghoul Imperium honor their god as the great deities are honored on the surface. The greatest of these lies in the Necropolis of the White City and is built entirely of the bones of the faithful.

The current high priest in the South is the God-King Sut-Akhaman. The high priestess in the subterranean lands is Lucretia Tideblood (LE human darakhul cleric 10 [Anu-Akma]).

MASKS

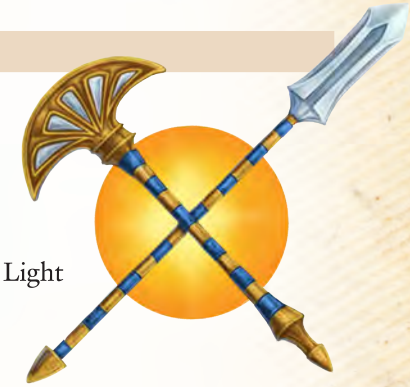
The greatest mask of Anu-Akma is Anubis; the two are so conjoined that no one is certain which face is the true one. Charun is rumored to be a mask of Anu-Akma, and both churches distrust each other. Darker still, the hunger god Vardesain might be a mask of Anu-Akma. The jackal-headed god is called Hades in the Seven Cities, and Hel in the North.

OTHER FAITHS

Anu-Akma pretends to be a servant, but those who know him see a king. When his priests meet those of other faiths, they know the truth of things and conduct themselves accordingly. In the end, even the priests of other gods rest in the tombs and cemeteries that Anu-Akma watches.

Respect the ghosts and spirits of the ancestors, and their resting places. Rob no tomb. You are the purifier of life and a custodian of death, so prepare those around you for their inevitable journey and destination. Remind even the youngest that time is short. Be strict and efficient in your work; laziness serves no one, least of all yourself. Destroy anyone who blasphemes against the paradise of the Underworld.

ATEN



Sun God, Jealous Lord of Light and Good, Master of the Law, Father of Khors and Lord of the Horizons, Patron of the Khemti

DIVINE DOMAINS: Justice, Light

ALIGNMENT: Lawful Good

FAVORED WEAPON: Mace

Aten is a rarity among the gods of Midgard: a jealous god who forbids the worship of all others by his followers. Priests of Aten may never be pantheistic priests, and his followers are known for their unyielding devotion to their faith, including the expulsion of "unbelievers" from villages devoted to Aten.

Aten appears as a bronzed giant with a braided beard, piercing black eyes, and powerful chest. Worshipped among both humans and dwarves, statues of the monotheistic sun god are often somewhat similar to dwarves in his proportions, bald and bearded. He is not a maker and forger, but the shining light that defines the day, the protector of the weak and the elderly, a friend to

[redacted]

The preacher Ra-Amon-Ra foretold a dozen calamities and was martyred by the dragonkin 40 years ago, who burned him in a public bonfire during their invasion of Per-Xor. Despite this, his doom-telling is well recorded and attested in writings by his followers, among them dwarves (whose halls one of his prophecies spared from a Mharoti attack) and women. Nine human women and one dwarf comprised half of the prophet's 20 known disciples, and they are still a majority of his followers.

The *Eternal Tablet of Ra-Amon-Ra* and his wife's *Gospel of Aiysha* hold his prophesies. They are written in an archaic form of the Southern tongue and frequently found in various heretical forms as a Draconic text. Some versions claim that Ra-Amon-Ra was divine, others that he merely spoke divine truth. His followers

The cult around the prophecies of Ra-Amon-Ra is as strong as that of Aten in some ways, and the two sides of the faith are not entirely reconciled. The prophet's teachings offer forgiveness without effort and salvation for all those who proclaim belief and die in Aten's name. The kings of both Nuria Natal and the Mharoti Empire find the cult distasteful and have banned open worship of Ra-Amon-Ra, which only stokes his followers to further acts of sacred murder and mayhem.

Despite Ra-Amon-Ra cult's bloody reputation, the women of the prophet feed and clothe the poor and the sick, take up orphans, and care for widows and the elderly. Many of these grateful souls become followers of the word of Ra-Amon-Ra as well.

[redacted]

heroes and the foe of dark gods. His radiant face is diffic to look upon, for his divinity and glory outshine all mort understanding, and his solar magnificence likewise outshines all other gods.

So sure are the Aten-worshippers of this that claim all other gods are mere "reflections" or "pale shadows" of true godhood. The only gods whose divinity they debate much at all are those of Lada and Khors, Aten's semi-divine offspring. These the Atenites treat as saints, prophets, or powerful priests rather than as faiths of their own, and small shrines to Lada and Khors are common. The truly golden light of faith and reason, though, is clearly that of the Sun God himself.

Worshippers

Aten is followed by humans, dwarves, and gnolls in Nuri Natal and elsewhere in the South. His most devoted worshippers are those of Per-Xor and Saph-Saph, where a temple school of Aten teaches new generations of his priests and paladins.

Symbols and Books

The favored weapons of Aten are the mace and the staff, symbols of rule and divine authority. These are sometime combined with sacred texts to create ceremonial items, but under their gilding is a core of iron.

The sacred texts of Aten are the Word of the Invincible Sun and the Prophecies of Ra-Amon-Ra, a holy man.

Shrines and Priests

Aten's greatest shrine is the Tomb of the Prophet in the city of Per-Xor, though the healing waters of the Siwal temple are also famous. His priests are many and take ne names with their ordination. The greatest of them now i Ikhnaton of Siwal, a "simple preacher" who wanders Nu Natal and the Mharoti Empire preaching to crowds of Aten's love and the value of his scriptures. Most of Aten's priests practice polygamy; the custom is not uncommon the Southlands. The most powerful rulers among them a the high priest and high priestess of Per-Xor.

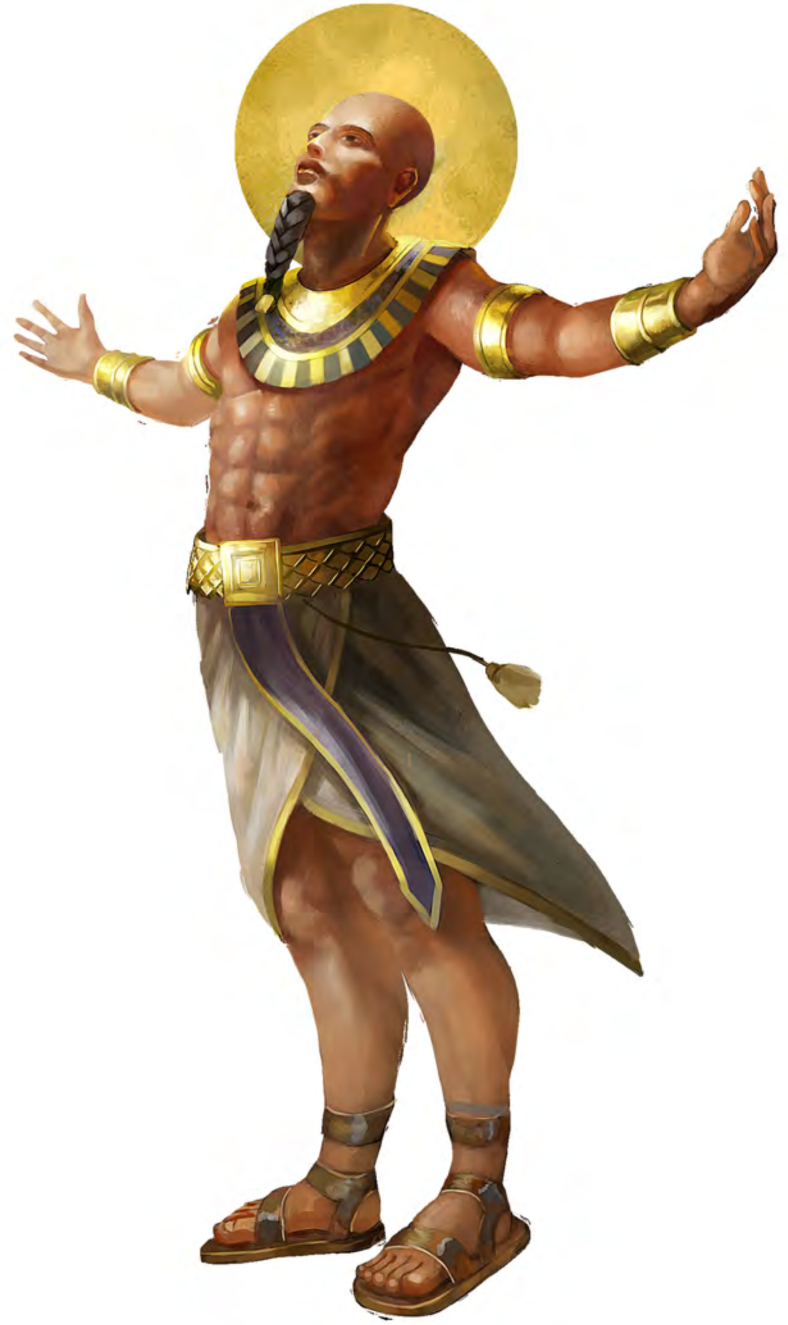
Aten's military orders are numerous as well, forming a sizable portion of the officer corps of Nuria Natal. The largest include the Order of the Phoenix, Brotherhood of the Temple, Sisterhood of the Solar Law, and Order of Radiant Justice.

Masks

Aten's masks are confusing and difficult for outsiders to understand, since adherents of the faith do not wish their true god to be compared or placed in company with other gods. However, priests of Khors and Lada believe Aten might be a mask of their faiths, and some imagine that Sif or even the White Goddess are masks of Aten. Radical priests argue that all other gods are masks of Aten.

Other Faiths

There are no other true faiths. Priests and paladins of other gods are to be ignored or slaughtered as unbelievers, as circumstances dictate. Temples of other gods should be



Heresy of the True Aten

The greatest danger to Aten is within his ranks. A portion of "secret initiates" worships Aten as the Father of Fire or the True Aten. This is an evil and abominable cult, as jealous as the majority but far more willing to use fire, assassination, and demonic pacts to ensure that the path of the True Aten is clear. Followers of the more moderate faith believe this True Aten is a mask of Loki or Baal, but those within the secret cult believe Chernobog or the White Goddess are his masks.

Heretical Divine Domains: Life, Light, Trickery

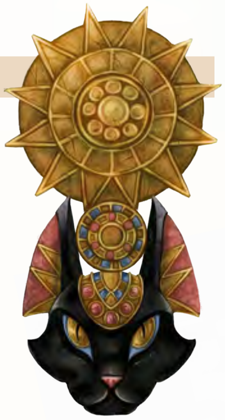
Heretical Alignment: Chaotic Evil

plundered for their vile heresy and falsehood. Followers of Khors and Lada are in error, but must be shown the way: Khors and Lada are not true gods but Aten's children, worthy of respect but not worship.

Aten's faithful reserve the greatest wrath for followers of the heretical "True Aten." Discovered members are invariably singled out for torture and inquisition, to destroy and root out this most unclean abomination and discourage others from adopting it.

What Aten Demands

Aten wants worship and sacrifice. Two hours must be spent in prayer daily; the sunrise, noon, and sunset hours are ideal for this reflection, and worshippers who fail to gaze upon the light-giving sun daily do so in peril of their souls and afterlife. Aten wants gold, gems, incense, and chanted prayers throughout the hours of the day, and candles, mirrors, and magical light to glorify his temples by night. All worshippers of Aten must attempt to convert infidels before slaughtering them, though this is sometimes a perfunctory effort at best.



Bastet (Ailuros)

Goddess of Cats and Hunters, Queen of Perfumes, Bastard Child of Aten, Mother of Alchemy, Patron of the Gnolls, Wife of Anu-Akma

Divine Domains: Cat, Hunting, Lust, Moon

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapon: Temple sword or bladed scarf

Bastet is the sunny, indolent, and dangerous sunny days and wild abandon, a force for cha opportunist. With her cat-headed statues and female form, she is the goddess of desire and t goddess of perfumers, alchemists, and those w is beauty. With the scent of the wild desert in he when she is a lioness, she is also the simple dom cat that destroys rats, serpents, and mice, a frien farmer and granary overseer.

Her ears are dark and her fur is golden; she has l breasts and sometimes six or eight of them. A sola lunar disk hovers over her head, and she wears brac the form of cobras or vipers.

Worshippers

Bastet attracts a strange medley of worshippers in keeping with her wild and fickle nature: alchemists, temple prostitutes, simple farmers, soldiers (though never officers), dancers—and the gnolls of Kesh and the metropolis of Per-Bastet as well.

Gnolls might not be the most obvious followers of Bastet, but given her marriage to jackal-headed Anu-Akma when the goddess married one of the gnoll-folk, she gained a whole new family. They are devoted to her, and her status as a supreme huntress endears her to these followers.

Symbols and Books

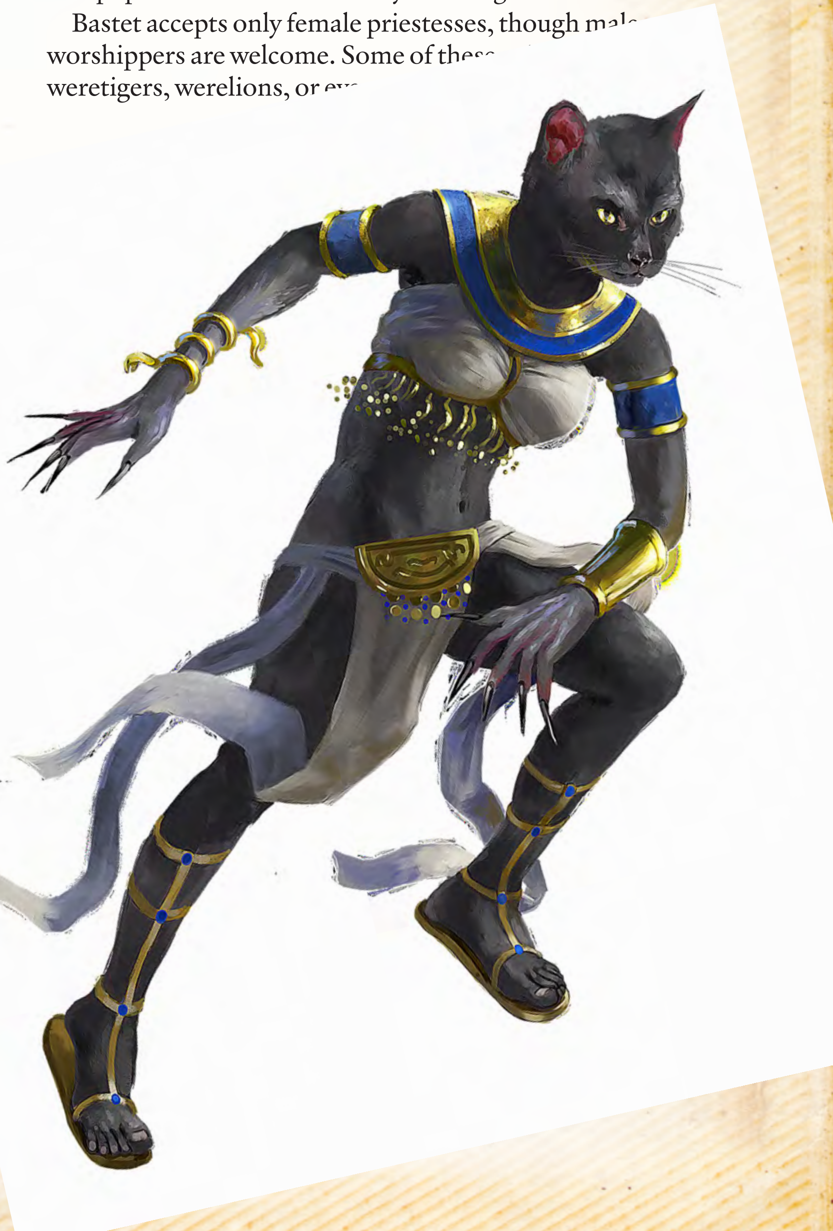
Bastet's symbol is the cat, depicted as a cat head with a solar disk above it. In some regions, the lion and cobra are her signs as well.

Bastet has relatively few sacred texts. The one that everyone knows is Divine Lives and Desires, a volume of sacred poetry and lusty parables. Few know of the Words of the Huntress, a darker volume.

Shrines and Priests

Bastet has her own city, the metropolis of Per-Bastet, where her rule is nigh absolute and where she frequently appears. It is a center of alchemy, perfuming, fine jewelry, and a surprisingly civilized Gnoll Quarter. Her temples are on every street, her priestesses are everywhere. The greatest temple is the Dome of the Divine Face of Bastet, built with a huge, soaring dome over a large interior and a dozen fragrant altars. The Black House of Anu-Akma next to it seems an afterthought. In her guise as Ailuros, she is also popular in the Grand Duchy of Bourgund.

Bastet accepts only female priestesses, though ma worshippers are welcome. Some of the weretigers, werelions, or ev



(though that last is more a scandalous story than reality), and many of her priestesses are also alchemists, rangers, or temple prostitutes.

MASKS

Bastet is called Ailuros in Bourgund and Artemis in the Seven Cities, where she is the goddess of perfume. In the Crossroads, she is associated with the demigod St. Hubertus the Hunter, and with the dark god the Hunter. Oddly, Bastet is one of the few human goddesses said to don a dragon god's mask: she is widely associated with Azuran, the Lord of the Air and Winds, and especially with the Eastern Wind.

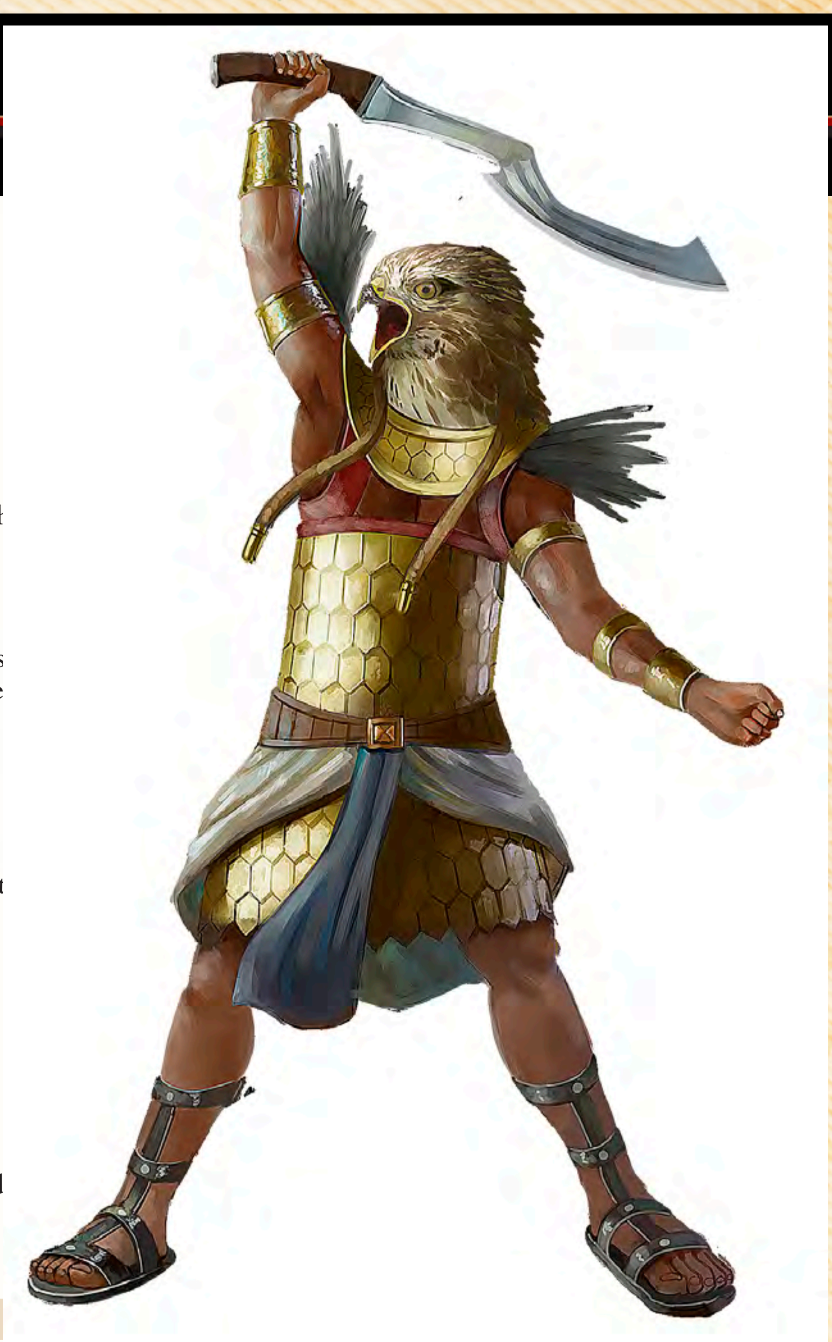
OTHER FAITHS

Temples of Bastet and her priestesses are on the best of terms with worshippers of Anu-Akma, and her priestesses and his priests marry in a "mirror marriage" reflecting the divine wedding.

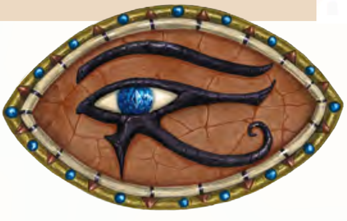
Her enemies are the dark goddess Marena (who perverts both lust and death), the moon goddess Hecate (who dares intrude on Bastet's oversight of the moon), and the jealous faith of Aten (whose followers consider Bastet a demonic abomination, not a goddess at all). Most of all, her followers hate the resurrected serpent god Set, as well as the corrupted reptilian gods Baal and Veles, whose followers are all anathema to right-thinking cat-worshippers.

WHAT BASTET DEMANDS

Take pleasure in life, and live for the day. Hunt and kill your food when you can; take joy in destroying serpents. Visit the perfumers frequently and offer up gifts of scent and spice to the goddess's altars. To divine the future, read the entrails of an enormous, unblemished animal, and sacrifice such a creature before any great endeavor.



HORUS



Sky Lord, Master of the Sun, the Moon, and the Heavens, the Desert Falcon, Prince of Princes, the Majestic One, the Chieftain, the Vigilant, the True King, Patron of Nuria Natal

DIVINE DOMAINS: Justice, Light, Tempest

ALIGNMENT: Lawful

FAVORED WEAPON: Khopesh sword

For long eons, as long as the sun and moon traversed the heavens, Horus was lord of the sky and the righteous god-emperor of the South. In time he grew tired and old, and the upstart Aten seized the mantle of power and cast Horus down. The people mourned, and briefly turned their eyes to the blinding glory of the sun.

Aten was soon absorbed by his vanities, and dark beings stirred in that time of neglect. Dragons rose in the east, a weakened Horus wandered the desert, the realm of his old rival Set, now defeated by the demon serpent Apophis. Horus rescued Set's corpse from defilement and performed the proper funerary rites. As reward, he gained dominion over Set's kingdom. Engulfed by the fiery desert, Horus arose rejuvenated from his ashes.

Reborn as a young warrior chieftain, hawk-headed or with the face of a handsome prince, Horus strives to reestablish the order of the world. Demons must be slain, and usurpers put in their place. Through bold deeds will Horus reclaim his rightful place and reunite Nuria Natal's fractured cities, and cast the dragon gods back into the East from whence they came.

WORSHIPPERS

The Nurians, their Sarklah cousins, and the Tamasheq Crescent nomads all follow Horus. People of action, they steer their tribes through the hardships of desert life and all threats to the people. Among his older following in the Nurian delta cities, Horus's popularity has diminished little, though other gods inspire louder, more public gatherings.

Horus's most fanatical believers are the heruti, enigmatic avian folk known elsewhere as huginn or ravenfolk. They are wandering desert mystics, sword masters, and dispensers of Horus's fury and justice.

Symbols and Books

Falcons are Horus's sacred animals and his representatives and emissaries. The Crown of Nuria Natal is also a symbol of Horus, but his greatest icon is the Eye of Horus, a potent ward against evil in the hands of the righteous.

Transcribed by King Hawk in the elder Nurian script, the Code of Horus details the falcon god's laws and precepts. Millennia old before lesser kingdoms were dreams, Nuria Natal was founded on the Code of Horus, and this divine text still governs the River Kingdom. The Chronicles of Kings and Wanderers contains popular tales of legendary figures favored by Horus. His priesthood uses the stories to instruct children and converts.

Shrines and Priests

Aside from numerous ancient temples in the delta cities, the Traveling Temples are the best known and most accessible of his shrines. These mobile shrines accompany caravans of traders, pilgrims, or performers and their priests serve as guards, healers, and guides. They protect and reaffirm Horus's faithful wherever they journey.

The Soaring Shrines rest atop high mountain peaks, desert rock outcroppings, and grand pyramids, sacred sites that demarcate the realm of old Nuria Natal. Horus's temples are large and airy, utilizing tall columns and huge open spaces and built into cliffs or atop mountains beneath the open sky.

The most famous temple, Khepri Khnum, stands on a mountaintop in the Chelamite range. It houses Horus's army of 10,000 birds and its priests are beautiful harpies with tremendous plumage.

In the Southlands, the priest and famed storyteller Old Khenses travels from town to town entertaining listeners with the Chronicles of Kings and Wanderers. The Wingless One is the grandmaster of the Talons of Heru, holy slayers of the falcon god's foes.

Masks

Khors might be Horus's avatar in lands north of Nuria Natal. Bolder theologians claim Aten is a mask of Horus, devised as a test of his faithful and to root out insidious evils hidden from him. Nomads of the steppes call Horus the Skyfather and hunt with his hawks on the plains. Horus is equated with the Imperial Eagle in Dornig and the Seven Cities (particularly in Valera) and sometimes even worshipped under his own name as an exotic cult in those nations.

In the Northlands, Horus is considered a mask of Wotan. At other times he is distinct, and called Tyr.

Other Faiths

Horus is the benevolent chief of the Southern pantheon and has deep, strong connections to each of the gods. Aten the False is another matter. Their intense rivalry stokes open hostility among their faithful. Try as he might, Aten cannot subsume Horus in the cities and chasing his wanderers into the desert is suicide.

As king, Horus welcomes foreign gods to his court if they come in peace. Such visitors have included Charun, Ceres, and Rava. If strange gods come to invade, they are met with holy steel and the divine eye of Horus.

Horus has many enemies, but most significantly the demon Apophis and his followers are abominations to be destroyed. The demon-dragon Baal, would-be conqueror of Nuria Natal, also draws Horus's kingly wrath.

What Horus Demands

The Code of Horus separates noble nomad from uncouth barbarian; obey it always. Battle and slay ancient abominations and their cults. Carry yourself in an upright manner, whether great king or lowly peasant. Treat others with hospitality and honor. Kill enemies who threaten your homeland and enslave their kin. Be princes among men and Horus will watch over you.

NINKASH

Mother of Beer, Goddess of Merriment, Patron of Brewers and Tavern Keepers, Matron Goddess of the Cantonal Dwarves

Divine Domains: Beer, Life

Alignment: Good

Favored Weapon: Mace

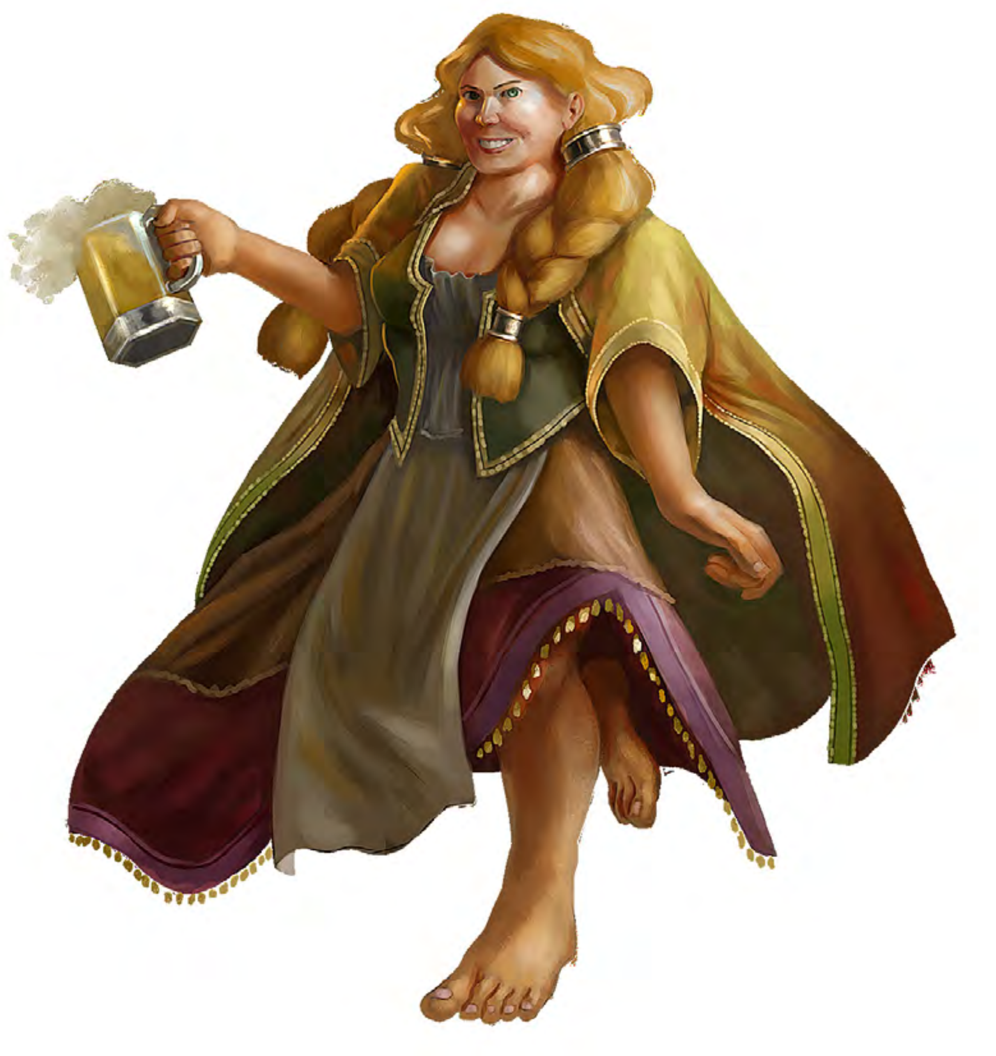
Dwarves love ale and consume prodigious amounts of it—at least by human measures—and become incoherent, clumsy, or simply fall asleep. The dwarves call this last condition "gone," short for "gone to visit Ninkash." And indeed, the matron mother goddess of ale and merriment was a great gift to the dwarves from the Kariv, who brought their goddess with them to the cantons and the Crossroads. Ninkash turned the rituals of brewing and drinking—such as Wotan's stern priests toasting the dwarven dead at midwinter—to a more frequent and joyful sacrament, though still a serious one. Ninkash embraced the dwarves, and they embraced her.

The public face of Ninkash is a golden-glowing, oversized tankard with a simple handle, an ever-full vessel floating in midair. To her faithful, she appears as a jovial, buxom dwarf woman clad in flowing robes of shifting color: one moment nut-brown, the next gold. Her garments are simple as a tavern maid's. The goddess appears barefoot, her clothes unbelted and low-cut. Ninkash always smiles. When displeased, her smile is slight and she shakes her head, and when pleased, she beams and extends her arms to sweep all into her bosom.

Worshippers

Dwarves in the Free Cantons and in the South revere Ninkash, as do the lower classes of Nuria Natal and some in Trombei, Salzbach, the Mharoti Empire, and distant

Khandiria and Sikkim. Ninkash is widely
the Kariv, who call her “Mother Ale.”



Symbols and Books

The holy symbol of Ninkash resembles a roughly drawn golden “Y” shape called the “baerra” (or munificence). Ninkash’s smile appears as a golden, rippling glow above altars and dwarves w
sing her praises as they enjoy her libation
Even unseen, Ninkash imparts direction
guidance, warning, or instruction.

Ninkash has few texts and appears pri
and drunken visions. A vision from the g
a golden tankard or rivers of ale spouting
and gutters, waterfalls plunging from the
or noisy dream taverns.

As a matron goddess, Ninkash symboli
morale, and she encourages pleasing self
family in small, daily things—kindnesses
and shared fellowship, dining, drinking, and hospitality. She is the goddess of inward desires and the demands of flesh and kinship, expressing oneself and questioning laws, authority and clan rule

Priests and Shrines

The priests of Ninkash are collectively cal
They all wear plain brown robes and carr
a miniature taster and a large belt-tankar
those priests who heard her voice from a
Indeed, they are kalath because they dared to respond.

The clergy of Ninkash advise the dwarves of a community, calming and soothing when necessary but also warning against other influences—even the clergies of other gods—when needed.

Within the vaer, male and female dwarves are equal: either gender may lead rituals or hold any rank or holy office. However, the devout claim that only dwarves may be true members of the vaer, although they do respect and work with “Holy Ones”—those rare non-dwarves who have “spoken with Ninkash.”

The most famous of Ninkash’s priesthood currently include Herma Heid, High Vaer of Kubourg in the Free Cantons, and Ekibe of the Barley, her premiere representative in Nuria Natal. Among humans, the best-known priestess of Ninkash is Mother Hapesh of the Barrels, who travels with the Kariv.

Masks

Some believe that Ceres is a mask of Ninkash, or her human face, while Ninkash is the dwarven mask of the same god. A few claim Sif or even Perun is her mask in the Northlands. The oldest dwarves remember when elves and dwarves argued over whether Ninkash or Baccho was greater; clearly, the dwarven goddess has endured and triumphed, while Baccho was a thin and watery god, a jape of Ninkash’s bottomless mirth.

Other Faiths

Priests of Wotan look down on Ninkash, and those of Loki consider her a fool and sometimes a useful weapon, but hardly serious. Baccho’s handful of followers consider Ninkash a “gutter faith” of commoners and those unable to compose proper poetry. Marena’s followers find her faith a pitiful group of drunks, unable to organize anything or hold to any great purpose. These are the only gods with much bad to say about her.

Most other deities consider her faith useful or at least harmless, offering comfort with the kind word and the gentle voice. Lada, Volund-Svarog, and even the strange

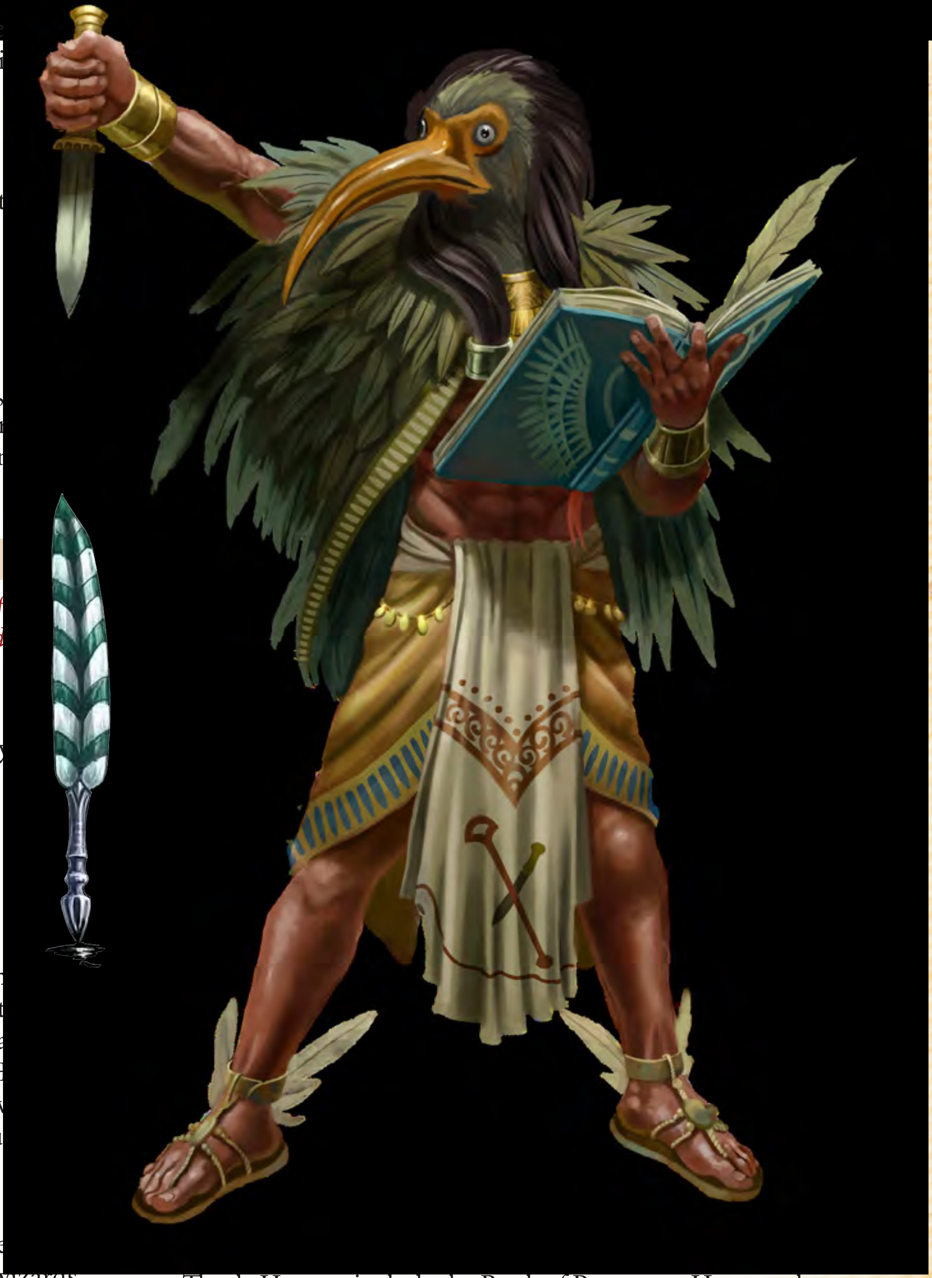
The Holy Ales

Vaer and lay worshippers of Ninkash spend their time brewing ale, storing it, and transporting it for ritual use. All the ale they make, which has had prayers to the matron goddess chanted over it during the brewing, is “holy ale,” but spells of the vaer make certain ales magical. Magical ales brewed by the vaer of Ninkash heal, regenerate, allow underwater breathing, or possess other magical properties.

priests of Seggotan and Hecate embrace her. He closest ally is Ceres of the Harvest, and legends i the South claim the two goddesses are sisters.

What Ninkash Demands

All must procure or make a personal tankard and use it to drink ale every day. Learn to brew it before you marry. Offerings of ale are accepted at her altars, and her clergy must learn the craft of brewing and alchemy as well. A dwarf is not a true dwarf unless that dwarf faces all secret fears, wants, and delights. The ales of Ninkash help worshippers set aside the armors of civility, and secrecy for a time, to let them see more clear ordinary ale is a road to truth, the holy ale of Ni the road to the mysteries of reality.



Thoth-Hermes

God of Knowledge and Learning, The Wise, Creator of Language, Lord of Merchants, Patron of Scholars and Thieves, Master of the Arcane Realms, Patron of the Magocracy of Allain

Divine Domains: Knowledge, Travel, Trickery

Alignment: Neutral

Favored Weapon: Staff, dagger

The face of Thoth-Hermes is a strange one, represented as an ibis, a stork, or sometimes a winged human head. His body is thin and sometimes stooped, sometimes a lithe youth, an he is frequently shown with either a cloak of feat winged sandals. Far more important than his sta his libraries and his market shrines, for Thoth-H the patron of both the retiring scholars and the v engaged merchants who carry goods throughou Midgard in search of profit.

Worshippers

Thoth-Hermes is worshipped by scholars, scribe merchants, thieves, messengers, travelers, and wizards throughout Nuria Natal and in the Seven Cities, and to a lesser degree in the Crossroads. They come from all sorts of backgrounds, but they are collectively curious, learned, and interested in knowledge both licit and illicit.

Most prominently, Thoth-Hermes is the patron of the Magocracy of Allain, and the being that wizards of that strange state turn to when their arcane workings confound them and their magic fails.

Symbols and Books

The favored weapons of priests of Thoth-Hermes are the staff and the dagger, symbols of magic and thievery and humble scholars. The penknife of Thoth is also honored, and a few diehards believe in carrying only a quill or stylus as his symbol and sign.

All books are sacred to Thoth-Hermes, and destroying a book is an abomination. The most famous sacred texts of Thoth-Hermes include the Book of Passage to Heaven, the Book of Magic, the 150 Sacred Rituals, the Book of Starry Wisdom, and the Book of the World, an encyclopedia of priestly knowledge. A secretive Emerald Order of priests and scholars jealously guards a volume referred to as the Emerald Tablet (see *Demon Cults & Secret Societies* for more on the Emerald Order).

Shrines and Priests

The greatest shrines of Thoth-Hermes are libraries, such as the Great Library of Friula in the Seven Cities, the library of Salzbach, and the library-temple of Siwal. Just as important and far more numerous are the small shrines in every market where Thoth-Hermes is worshipped: each contains a set of scales and a locked box for offerings. The scales are true and well balanced, and theft from the god's offerings is met with swift death at the hands of Thoth-Hermes's more fanatical followers.

Thoth-Hermes has no major military orders, but his followers fill the legions of spies, diplomats, and couriers that armies rely on, not to mention the wand-wielding elite companies of spellcasters. The most famous of these is the Blue Wands company of Bemmea mercenaries that occasionally serves in the Seven Cities.

Masks

Northlanders assume Thoth-Hermes to be a mask of Loki or Wotan. Folk of the Crossroads associate him with Sarastra, the fey goddess of magic and the night, and a few believe Thoth-Hermes is a mask of the Goat of the Woods who led the mages of Caelmarath into their tragic war.

Other Faiths

The followers of Thoth are either indifferent to the world beyond the scriptorium door or deeply engaged with it as messengers and explorers. The priests retain a special hatred for the cults of Totivillus, the patron demon of scribes, and likewise for Mammon, god of greed (a corruption of honest trade). They are rivals to Sarastra, goddess of night and magic. They are friendly with most other faiths, especially those of Lada the Golden and Horus. The temples of Bastet and Aten are boisterous targets for Thoth-Hermes's more earthy and thieving followers.

What Thoth-Hermes Demands

All worshippers of Thoth-Hermes must be literate and numerate; ideally, most have valuable knowledge or skills useful in the creation of further knowledge, trade, or wisdom. All followers of Thoth-Hermes must produce a collection of new lore, maps, arcane mysteries, or personal experiences once in their lifetime, creating a "life book" of value to savants and future generations. Destroying books is forbidden, but their theft is a sign of skill and divine favor.

CITY GODS

The Seven Cities have more need of the gods than most and pay them much less attention than one would think. The gods of the Seven Cities have waxed and waned, being displaced by elven gods like Sarastra, Freyr, and Freyja at the height of the Valeran influence, and swinging back to its human gods since then. The Septime gods are fighters, intriguers, and more than a little dangerous, like the people of the region.

The leader of the pantheon and the patron of the region is the war god Mavros, and his order's influence cannot be overstated. The temples to the elven gods have been largely abandoned, and the gods have repeatedly turned against one another. The Septime priests and oracles fight for their beliefs, sometimes literally, and enslavement of divine messengers, priests, and even gods has a long history here.

In the Seven Cities, religion is close to war, and only the civilizing hand of Ceres restrains the region from even more frequent bloodbaths. Discussions of religion rarely end well, and foreign priests get hard stares, especially those who preach or proselytize.

TABLE 12–6: MAJOR GODS OF THE SEVEN CITIES

Name	Typical Worshippers
Ariadne (Rava)*	Gearforged, merchants, kobolds
Ceres	Farmers, merchants
Charun	Soldiers, mourners, the grieving
Hecate	Kammae, minotaurs, witches
Mavros	Soldiers, guards
Nethus	Sailors, fisherfolk, pearl divers

*See Ariadne (as Rava) under "Crossroads Gods."

CEREs THE PROVIDER

Goddess of the Harvest and Civilization, Mother of Grain, Lady of Merchants, Matron of Prosperity, the Traveler's Friend, Wearer of the Golden Sleeves, Patron of Trombei

Divine Domains: Life, Nature, Travel

Alignment: Good

Favored Weapon: Sickle, scythe

Ceres is a goddess of civilization. Her domain is the worked field, the developed land, the trading house, and the road that connects them. All feel her presence whenever large groups of people gather together, and her favor leads to prosperity. Followers of Ceres are builders and growers: they domesticate animals and grow crops, build roads for trade and travel, and create communities.

She is the patron of farmers, shepherds, crafters, merchants, and travelers. Although she favors unity, her unity does not necessarily engender peace. Her urban and rural followers are often in conflict, both overtly and quietly.

Cerean harvest rites include the Spring Rite of Sowing and the Fall Rite of Harvest. The week-long sowing rite culminates in the crowning of the Harvest Maiden, which associates the health of a young woman to the village's crops. The harvest rite includes dances and long parades and ends in an enthusiastic celebration of thanks.

In cities, all market days are dedicated to Ceres, when farmers come to the city for trade. Market days immediately following harvest rites are major holidays.

Worshippers

Most of the Seven Cities region venerates Ceres, with her largest following in the Republic of Trombei. Humans represent her most devoted worshippers, although she welcomes all races. Most are advocates of peace and commerce, and city guards pay her respect.

[redacted]

most notably serpent cults based in the marsh of Trombei. These worshippers practice blood including sacrificing an unhealthy Harvest M choose another, healthier maiden. During the Reaping they sometimes attempt wholesale sl their enemies. Even in peace, the Reapers are their love of excess.

Symbols and Books

Ceres looks like a young woman holding a sic a shaft of wheat, flanked by a dog and a serpe images of Ceres the Reaper show her with gol bracers and scaled servants. A lost holy book o knowledge entitled The First Seeds is sought b Commune of Trombei.

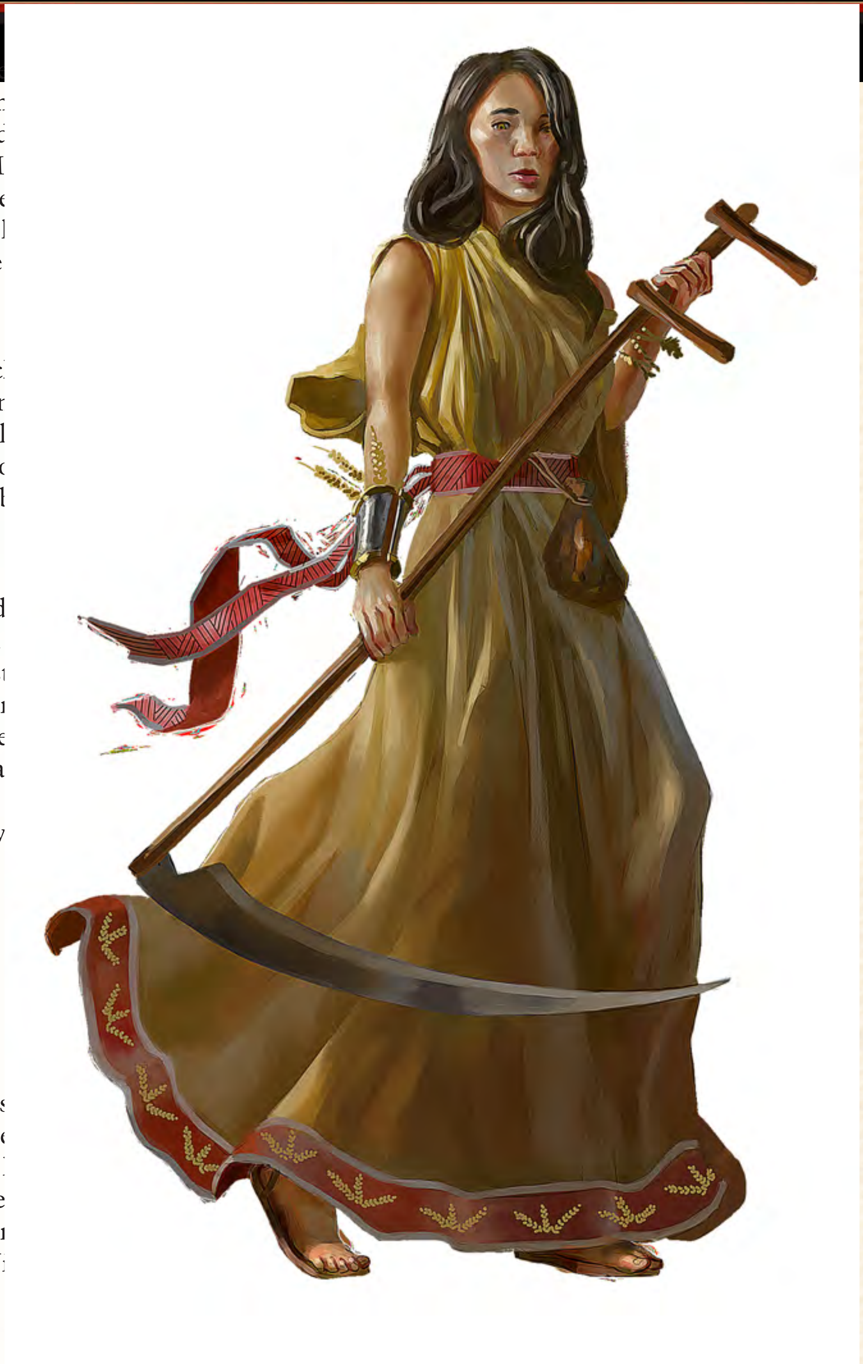
Shrines and Priests

Temples of Ceres are built of wood and found near market districts. They are destroyed and rebuilt every 50 years during a celebratory fes to reflect the seasonal aspect of all things. Her feature high-quality polished wood. Her large temple—the Temple of Endless Sheaves—sta a small hill within the walled city of Trombei, serves as both market and bank for her follow

The high harvester for the last 20 years has been Jana Waltin of Trombei, best known for her shrewdness. She seeks to limit the animosity between rural and city followers, with limited success.

Masks

In rural areas Ceres is worshipped as Ceres-of-the-Harvest, whereas in urban areas she is as Ceres of the Golden Sleeves, venerat for her role in commerce. Rare cults worship dark aspect: Ceres the Reaper (sometimes Ce Vindicator), who brings famine and misfortu enemies. She is sometimes associated with N with Yarila and Porevit.



Other Faiths

Ceres is friend and rival to Rava. Her relationship with Mavros is not as cordial; although not enemies, his actions and those of his followers threaten her domains. Similarly, her followers view Hecate's followers with some mistrust. Her enemies include Baal and the White Goddess.

Ceres values teamwork and cleverness. She expects her followers to help in the harvest rites and honor farmers. She favors those who make a yearly pilgrimage to her temple in Trombei specifically to venerate her, and she expects her worshippers to participate in the raising of a temple at least once in their lifetime. Food may never be stolen. Protect farmers, herders, cooks, and growers, and

[redacted]

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Weight	Properties
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

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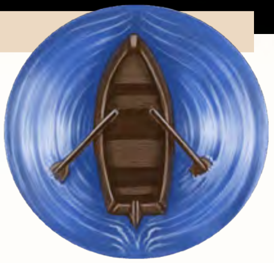
CHARUN



God of Death, Master of the Rivers Styx and Lethe, Guardian of Souls, Watcher at the Door, Patron of Sailors and Gravediggers

Divine Domains: Death, Ocean, Travel

Alignment: Neutral

Favored Weapon: Staff

Charun oversees the passage of souls: at birth, at death, and in the afterlife, maintaining the proper steps along the natural roads. He protects planar travelers, especially mortals, from demons and celestials alike. Charun uses the undead as tools and servants, though he sees them as the damaged shells of his charges, holding only a few scattered memories. Darakhul, vampires, and liches gain higher regard in his eyes, since they retain their personalities. Immortal creatures such as outsiders and the fey meet with Charun's disapproval if he finds them in Midgard, because all too often they trade souls and disrupt their natural migration.

Charun wears a hood in most depictions, and his features are never clear. Visions of the god include snakelike hair, a hooked nose, large boar tusks, heavy brows, cold blue or fiery eyes, or a long black beard. Most agree that his arms are pale cream, though others say Charun has blue or gray skin; all agree on the snake tattoos on his forearms.

Worshippers

All mortal creatures worship Charun to some degree, for all things die, but those who see death on a regular basis become devoted followers: soldiers, executioners, mourners, necromancers, and the grieving.

The Ghoul Imperium considers Charun a weak god for slaves. There, Charun's worship is part of Anu-Akma's rites (secretly or openly), and Charun offers the hope of escape. Charun is one of relatively few gods worshipped by creatures of the planes, due to his control of planar rivers.

Charun the Boatman is a popular figure among the river elves of the Arbonesse, who consider him a sheltering and welcoming figure after a long life. He is likewise popular among shadow elves, who see his control of the planes and shadow roads as powerful and worthy of supplication.

Symbols and Books

Charun's symbol is a boat or an oar, but a few of his cults use a folded loop over a river. His holiest book is the River Passage, which records his dirges and hymns. Chiron's Coin explains the clergy's duties.

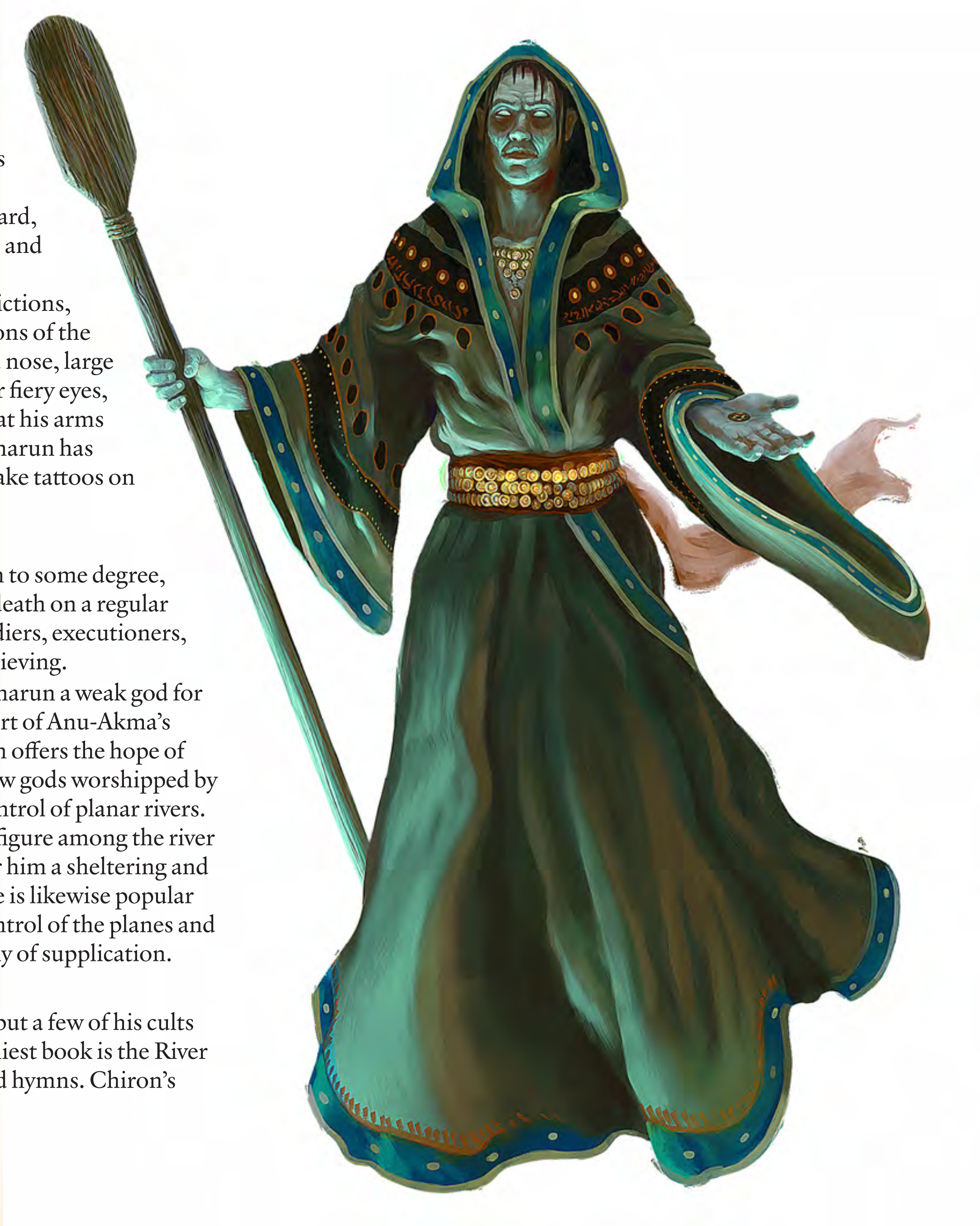
Shrines and Priests

Charun's holiest sites are graveyards and rivers, and many of these sites connect to other planes. Temples to Charun provide midwifery, funeral services, and exorcism of hauntings. For a significant fee, his priests guide those venturing beyond the mortal realms. Undead are rare within church grounds, but common in adjacent graveyards as guardians. All clergy must learn about healing, the undead, or the planes.

The pale figure named Vanth is the current high priest in the city of Valera, home of the faith.

Masks

Anu-Akma, Marena the Red, Seggotan, and Thoth-Hermes are all rumored to be masks of Charun. In the North, he is called Hod the Blind, god of caves and



darkness, and considered a minor son of Wotan. A few even claim Chernobog as one of Charun's masks, but this is rank heresy among his faithful.

Other Faiths

Charun frequently quarrels with Anu-Akma, who also claims ownership over the fate of souls, and with Sarastra, goddess of darkness and magic among the elves and shadow fey. Charun and Ceres are sometimes said to be lovers or married, and Charun and Rava consult together when fates grow tangled.

What Charun Demands

Bury the dead according to their rites; leave no body to rot, not even those of enemies. Venture into darkness and learn to walk without light. Protect those entering this world and those leaving it. Honor the remains of the deceased, and destroy rampaging undead and thieving immortals. Visit a gravesite at least once a week, to maintain it and meditate on the end of all things.

HECATE

Bringer of Magic, Lady of Darkness, Lady of Sighs, Lady of Tears, Opener of Doors, the Queen of Night, Patron of Kammae Straboli, Wife of the Ocean

Divine Domains: Darkness, Knowledge, Labyrinth, Moon

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapon: Dagger, garrote

The ways of the gods are inscrutable to mortals, and the ways of Hecate are likewise inscrutable to the gods. Hecate embodies change and transformation, and her actions seem haphazard. Her worshippers believe she uses her foreknowledge to improve the world, while her detractors say her visions of the future have driven her insane.

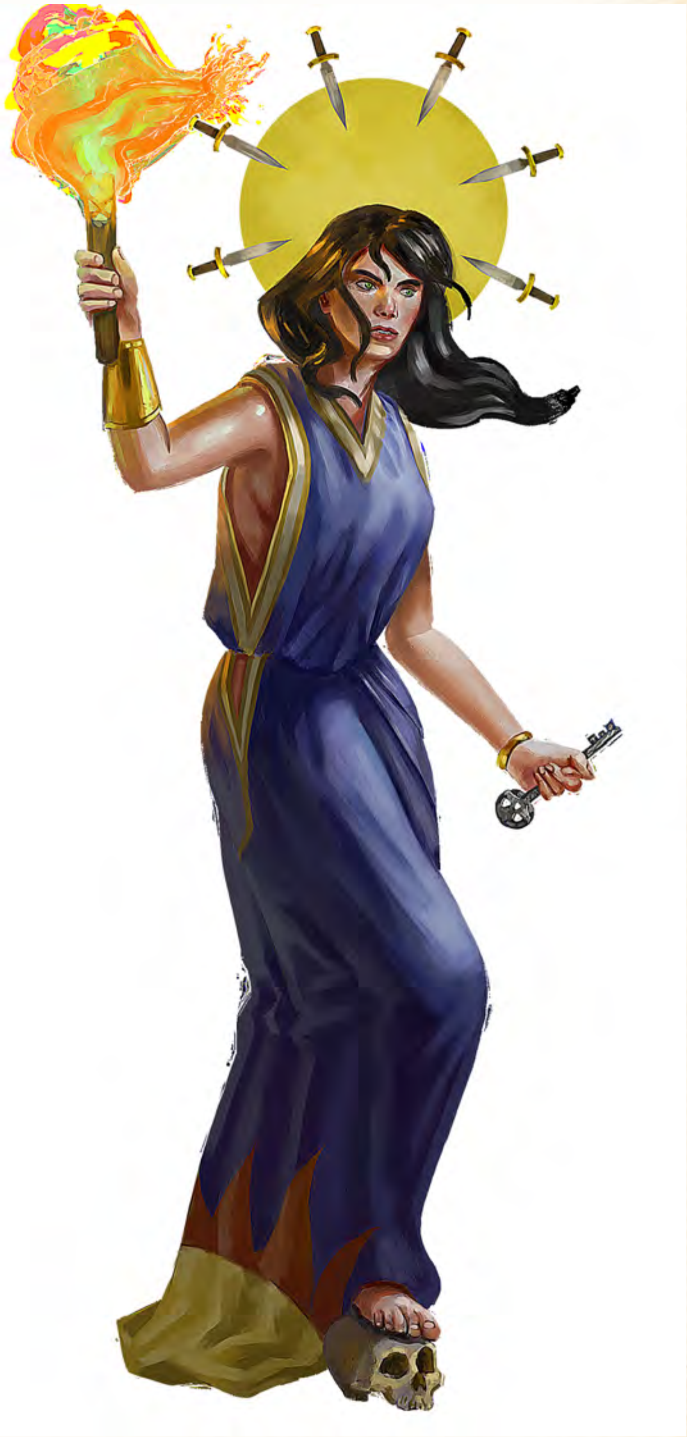
Once an ally of Nethus, she was responsible for his enslavement and his release. Her followers insist the act was necessary. Others believe she usurped much of his power, and for years the followers of Nethus made repeated attacks against her church. Now that the Marriage of Moon and Ocean has united the two churches, the priesthoods are growing more amicable, but some priests of Nethus refuse to forgive.

Hecate appears in three forms, depending on the phase of the moon. Most worshippers venerate all her forms, but some favor one over the others.

During the new moon, Hecate appears as the Lady of Darkness, a maiden who moves with a decisive and deadly grace. Capricious and vengeful, her followers are masters of poison, torture, and the shadows.

At the half moon, she becomes the Lady of Sighs, a grown, dark-haired woman who appears in dreams to whisper arcane secrets to her followers. She opens all doors, including the one between life and death. She holds a key in one hand and a book in the other. Mysterious and aloof, she favors arcanists, the fey, and shape changers.

Hecate's full moon aspect is the Lady of Tears, elderly and benevolent and holding a lantern or lamp. White or gray-haired, she reveals the future to her servants as she grieves for the pain of the world.



WORSHIPPERS

Hecate is venerated in the Seven Cities, on the minotaur island of Kyprion, and in Roshgazi and Cindass, the ancient minotaur homeland. Her worship is strongest in the Theocracy of Kammae Straboli, where she is patron and the undisputed greatest of gods. She has many followers in the Green Duchy of Verrayne and in the Magocracy of Allain. Most of her worshippers are human, but Hecate also commands sizable followings among kobolds, minotaurs, and lycanthropes.

SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

Hecate's symbols are the moon, the dagger, the key, the book, and the lamp, and her followers wear small amulets or pins with these symbols. For her priests, her most complex symbol is a triangle within a circle, representing her three forms and the moon.

Hecate's primary book of worship is the Book of Mysteries. It contains rituals and rules for any time of year and offers detailed instructions on how followers should live their daily lives.

Her church holds numerous celebrations, with the most important at Midsummer, the Harvest Moon, and the Hunter's Moon.

SHRINES AND PRIESTS

Hecate's most famous temples are grand stone structures in Kammae Straboli, in particular the Great Gold and Silver Temple of the Three Goddesses, which Hecate shares with Lada and Rava. Her temples all have central rooms or shrines with certain rooms open to view the moon. Her most famous priestess is the Oracle of Kammae Straboli, Yeneva Podella. The Bemmean mage called Erramun the Sleepless is also a devoted follower of note.

MASKS

To most, Hecate is her masks, and each of her many faces deserves worship. It does not matter if some claim another name for her, such as Azuran, Marena, Thoth, or Seggotan. Many elves and shadow fey believe Hecate is a mask of Sarastra, but this view is not widely held among her human followers.

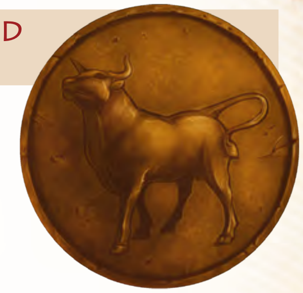
OTHER FAITHS

Hecate has always held herself apart from other gods and their worshippers. This isolation has grown stronger since the chaining of Nethus, as other faiths become ever more distrustful of Hecate, even leading to outright violence. Her enemies reach far beyond the Seven Cities, including Bastet, rival goddess of the moon, and followers of Khors the sun god as well as of Mavros, who claim Hecate was wed to Mavros and that he deserted her over her affair with Nethus. Her new husband Nethus is a notable exception to the general animosity, as are Sarastra, Lada, and Ninkash.

WHAT HECATE DEMANDS

Seek and acquire knowledge, and learn magic or shapeshifting if you can. Follow the Mysteries and obey the orders of her chosen unquestioningly. Attend her services at least once a week. Speak many languages and revere the spirits of the dead. All items of magic and transformation belong to the goddess. Keep no secrets from her priests.

MAVROS THE WAR GOD AND HIS ORDER



Master of War, God of Blood and Honor, Lord of Strife and Rebirth, Patron of Valera and the Seven Cities, the Thunderbolt

DIVINE DOMAINS: Life, Tempest, War

ALIGNMENT: Neutral

FAVORED WEAPON: Longsword, spear

Mavros is the patron god of most of the Seven Cities, and it is his will that they remain at war as a holy mission. His domains and masks are well known and well described, and he is associated with his "brothers" Perun and Thor. His extensive church forms a culture unto itself in the south; some adventurers, mercenaries, and priests proclaim their loyalty to the priest-commander and the House of Swords, rather than to any city-state.

WORSHIPPERS

Followers of Mavros in the Seven Cities include soldiers, most citizens of Valera, and captains and officers throughout the land. Women and children view him as a protector, beyond his role as the god of war.

SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

The works of Mavros in the Seven Cities are compiled in two volumes, one used frequently in prayer and titled the Call to Glory. The second is a historical and mystical collection called the Annals of Mavros, which is a work of some difficulty. Only a few copies exist, and they are magically impervious to copying (said to be a curse of Loki or the archdevil Totivillus). Worse, they are frequently stolen, moved, or transported by divine heralds of Mavros.

SHRINES AND PRIESTS

The greatest temple of the faith is the Golden Pantheon of Mavros in Valera , where the High Pontifex of Valera, Miter Konya Mellas, presides over the faith and its relics. The Order of Mavros, sometimes called the Red Knights, maintain most other sites of religious significance.

MASKS

Called Perun in the east and Thor in the Northlands, Mavros is widely known throughout Midgard. Some believe he is a brother to Horus and Takhar in the Southlands.

GREAT SAINTS OF MAVROS

The church of Mavros constantly breeds saints and martyrs, but some are better remembered than others. These 20 are popular throughout the Septime region and beyond.

1. St. Aethenea the Bibliotor was a Friulan librarian who braved the deepest recesses of the Great Library to recover the fabled Annals of Mavros. She learned the precise strategy to beat an undead army that threatened the Seven Cities and vanished with the Annals afterward.
2. St. Arahen of Hammerfall charged deep into the opposing camp after breaching a besieger's tunnel. Thought fatally wounded, he detonated his remaining magical charges, destroying the enemy's command tent. Dwarven patron saint of sappers.
3. St. Elian commanded his company and held a bridge outside Parzsan for three days, even after they were cut off and he was disemboweled. Patron saint of the abandoned.
4. St. Elda of Krakova woke from her wounds and clawed her way out of a mass grave. She slipped past an enemy army and delivered a timely warning to her duke. Patron saint of the unconscious.
5. St. Axel Bruch of Trombei led from the front. Captured 999 enemies using caltrops and nearby swamps. He died after he won a beer quaffing contest and kept quaffing.
6. St. Benbo Marchione of Trombei made tremendous profits as a condottiere (mercenary leader) across and beyond the Seven Cities. He became a saint thanks to his enormous donations of coin to the church.
7. St. Brigantia from Valera was known as the Lady of a Thousand Victories; a highly charismatic mercenary whose company never knew defeat. Once a year, the church parades her magical spear across the city square in Valera.
8. St. Darthene Squarcianano of Melana, the tiny child terror saint. Orphaned by dwarven raiders when her city fell, Darthene took to madly threading through streets with a barber's razor, hamstringing dwarven warriors foolish enough to ignore her.
9. St. Horius of Trombei was a farmer who instigated and led one of the most effective worker uprisings in Trombei's history. Revered as a fighter and folk hero for peasants and the poor.
10. St. Kalon Parvalas of Valera saved the emperor's life repeatedly at home, abroad, and even at sea. Kalon established the first Centaur Guard of the Imperial Presence.
11. Sts. Lurak and Laurin of Valera, a twin brother and sister. When Lurak fell on the Field of Salmar, Laurin stood alone beside his body and refused to retreat. She slew 50 men before falling.
12. St. Mirolch the Mad was a minotaur pirate from Triolo. One of the bloodiest ever known, he captured and burned more than 100 ships as sea pyre offerings to Mavros.
13. St. Nostca of the Cupped Hands miraculously provided food for Capleon during a lengthy siege when hunger ran through the city. Townsfolk thank Nostca whenever they find a hidden stash or unanticipated gift.
14. St. Oubran of Melana served as a cook for the armies of Valera. No soldier, the brave man defended the camp against hundreds, saving the stores as well as the women and children, with only a cleaver and skillet.
15. St. Rosinade was blessed with sweat deadly to dragons. Fighting against a Mharoti landing, this enormous man wrestled an adult dragon into submission. His devout prefer the intimacy of fighting with bare hands instead of weapons.
16. St. Tancredi was a knight of Friula who lost both his arm and horse to a single ballista bolt. Tancredi cauterized the wound with a torch and continued charging at the enemy lines, sending them into a panic.
17. St. Teador the Unfortunate was a brave Valeran knight, martyred when he was lured into the hills while traveling home from battle. He was ripped to pieces by drunken satyrs and lustful maenads serving the Red Goddess .
18. St. Thumbol of Achillon broke his chains while being burnt at the stake for his faith. While burning and being stabbed by halberds, he strangled the inquisitor who ordered his death. Patron saint of the falsely accused.
19. St. Ulvert the Twice-Maimed was an officer born in Trombei. When captured by pirates, he asked to be tortured in place of his soldiers. His mummified hand is a relic conserved in Trombei's port.
20. St. Whiteskull of Bratislor: A ghoul mercenary who created his own legions from the dead. It took a clockwork brigade to defeat him. A patron saint in the Greater Duchy of Morgau and among the ghouls.

OTHER FAITHS

Mavros was the husband of Hecate, but that marriage is over; he is devoted to Marena the Red now, and his faith is otherwise only loosely connected to others. His enemies include Lada the Golden Goddess, whose priests urge peace.

WHAT MAVROS DEMANDS

Mavros wants victory! Worshippers are expected to seek out battle and keep their martial skills well honed. The perfect death for a follower of Mavros is on the battlefield—they abhor death of old age. Followers of Mavros must attend the mysteries at his temple before any great battle or long journey, and must never abandon a comrade's body on the field. Cowardice is shameful and abhorrent. All worshippers of Mavros must make the pilgrimage to the Seat of Mavros at least once in their lifetime. Fights, duels, and combats may never be refused. Retreat is acceptable, but victory is the fir goal of a follower of the war god.

THE ORDER OF MAVROS

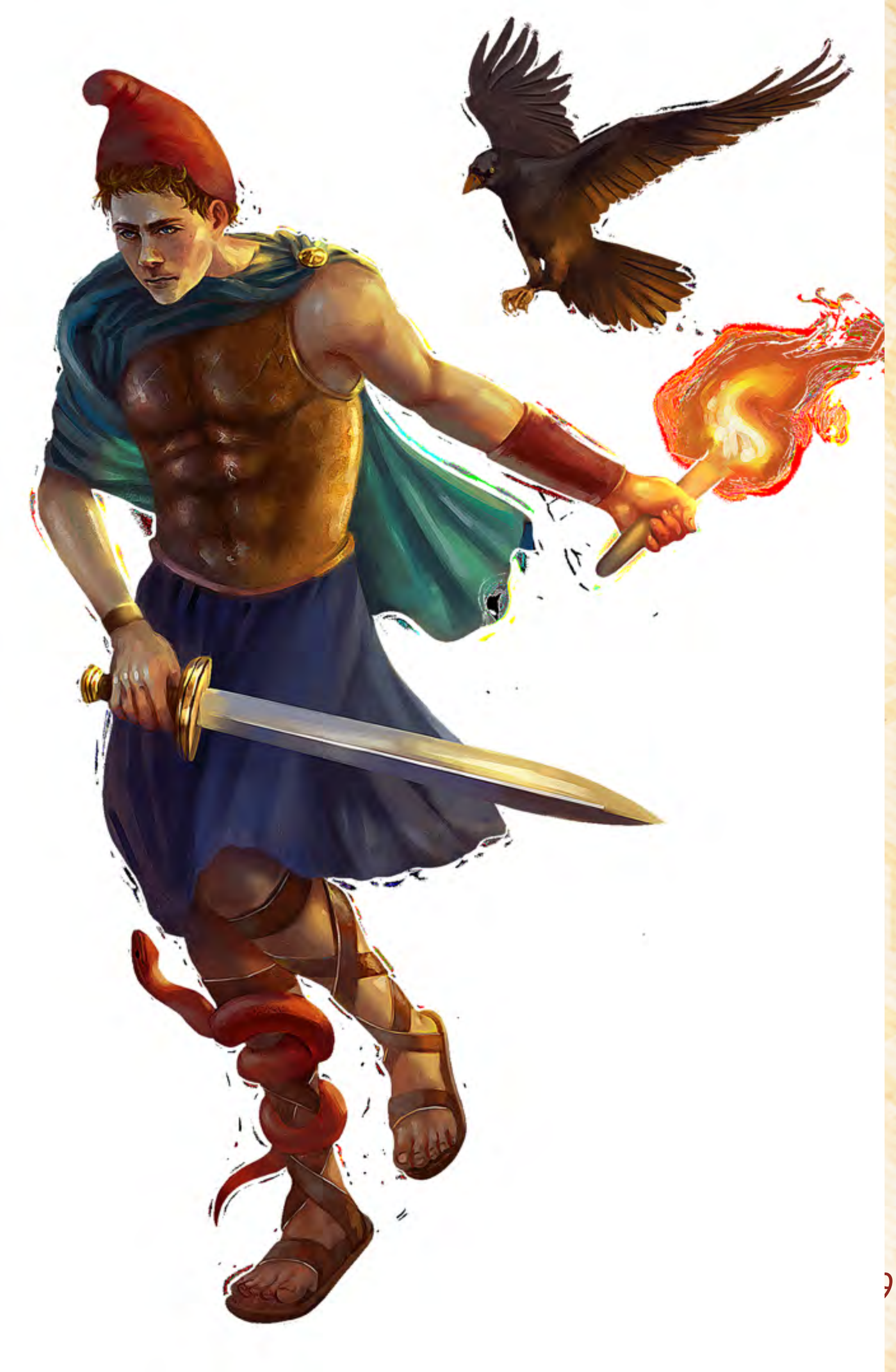
The militant order of Mavros's church comprises a large part of its total clergy, and its priest-commander, the blessed Armengol de Aspa, is a militant and spiritual power throughout the Septi lands. Rulers vie to curry favor with him. The church fortifies its temples, teaches martial skills in its courtyards, and blesses the troops of every nation with relative even-handedness. However, the church also holds itself aloof from local laws, and thus every temple-fortress is not only sacred ground but also safe haven for criminals.

Those who join the clergy are forgiven their past crimes and may not be charged with offenses committed before their ordination. Those who join the clergy this way must display their contrition through leading at least one first banner during an attack on a strong position such as a castle wall or fortified redoubt. Many who escape punishment as criminals find their courage fails them in this devotion. They are dealt with especially harshly within the church, so taking on calling as a priest of Mavros is not widely seen as a easy escape from criminality.

The order of Mavros includes clerics, fighters, a paladins. Druids and rangers are not part of the fa

Those who swear their weapons to Mavros gain widespread respect in the Septime lands and follo clear hierarchy. The lowest members are the squir priest-pages, little more than servants to the pries Next up are the sworn sword-brothers and sword- veteran fighters or mercenaries. The next rank inc the temple knights, who have sworn to defend the and to wage war unceasingly against the enemies Septime cities and the faith of Mavros. They answ priests and paladins, who are the next rank of the church. Finally, ruling the entire church are the holy bladesaints, the high priests, oracles, or powerful paladins, and including the priest-commander.

Separate from all these are the hard-bitten members of the Order of Blood, better known as the Hounds of Mavros, the god's inquisitors. They answer to the priests and bladesaints but operate separately, collecting tithes and punishing the wicked. Their leader is the Bladesaint Ulderico Vensali, a gentle man of good breeding who is utterly ruthless in defense of the order and the pontifex, the relics of the saints, and the shepherding of the faithful. Though not as powerful as the pontifex or the priest-commander, sly and stubborn Bladesaint Ulderico keeps the House of Blood Mercy running smoothly.



House of Swords

The head chapterhouse and temple of Mavros in the South is the House of Swords, located south of Valera in the central hills. It commands a valuable pass and is the starting point for the most common pilgrimage, from the House of Swords to the Seat of Mavros in the blasted wastes to the north. This is the seat of the Priest-Commander Armengol de Aspa, the place of ordination for most of the priesthood, and also the site of a relatively rare institution, a nunnery for female acolytes. The castle holds more than 1,000 people, half of them clergy, the other half servants and the faithful come to petition the church.

The House of Swords is within sight of another important location for the followers of Mavros: the House of Blood Mercy, home to the inquisitor's Order of Blood. Prisoners held here never escape, and the inquisitors carry out executions out for cowardice, betrayal, blasphem pacifism, and other crimes against the faith of the wa Mavros's character in the south is notably bloodier a harsher than in the North, where his role as Thunder and protector against the Serpent receives more emp

Pilgrimage to the Seat of Mavros

The journey from the House of Swords to the Seat of Mavros is more than 900 miles over hills and fields, civilized territory and through the goblin wastes. No can contemplate it, and even healthy, hardened warr are sometimes killed making the trip (a fate said to c special virtue on the dead warrior). Riding horses or mounts is permitted but rare; most of the devout co it less worshipful to ride to the Seat.

The trip takes two months on foot in each directio with several river crossings and risk of goblin or ban attacks. Because of the dangers involved, a member Order of Mavros leads each pilgrimage party of 12 to people. That knight or priest is responsible for guidi and defending the pilgrims (who are armed as well). arrived at the Seat, all worshippers make offerings, s fight a sacred bout against a fellow worshipper (to fir blood, unless the devotees declare otherwise), and th make the return journey.

Nethus

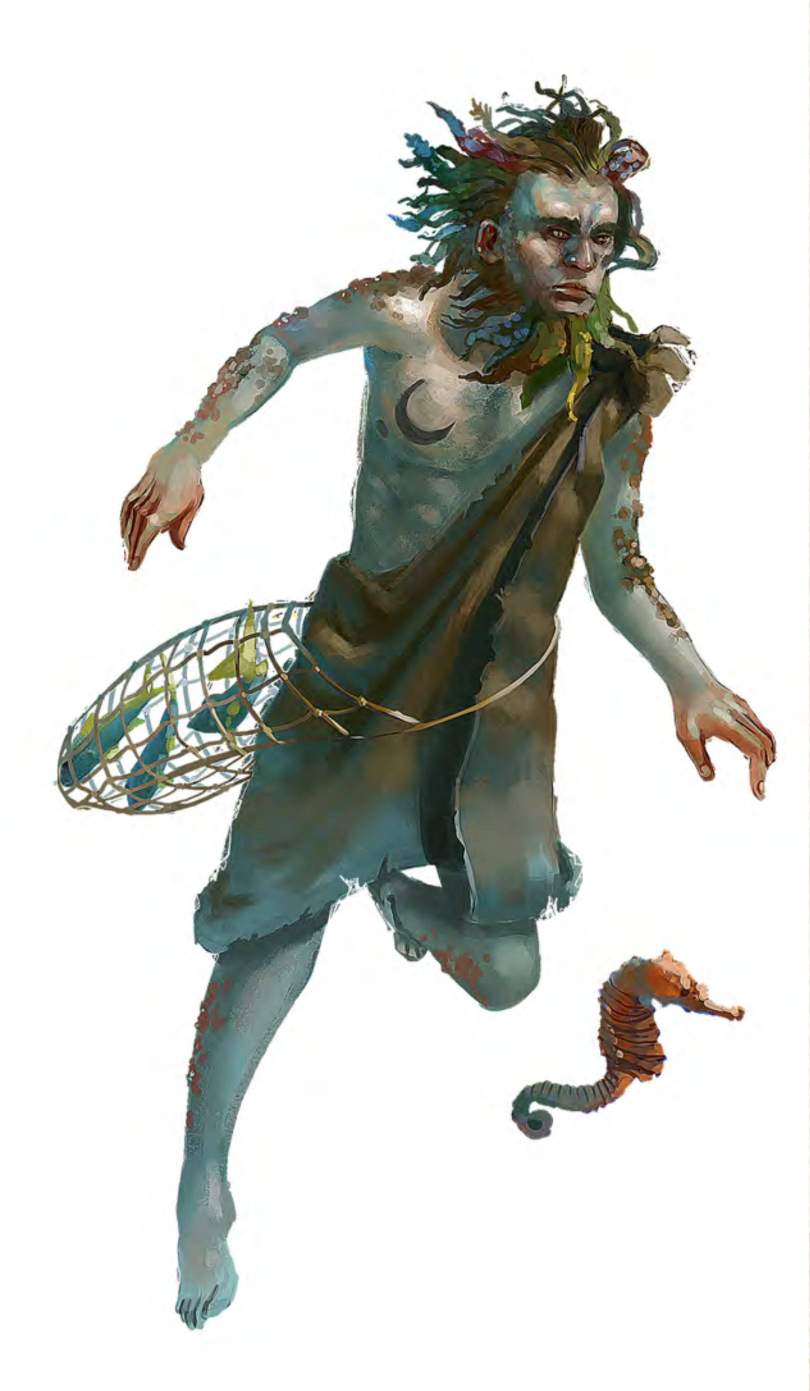
King of the Sea, Master of Waves, Patron of Kammae and Ankeshel, Lord of Fish and Whales, God of Broken Chains, Keeper of Storms, Protector of Ships

Divine Domains: Ocean, Tempest, Travel

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapon: Trident, net

Once beloved throughout Midgard, Nethus has fallen far since he was chained and held as a prisoner by the Oracle of Kammae. He has since been freed (and his wife Mnemosyne imprisoned and forgotten), but many of his old temples were abandoned and others overtaken by Seggotan, the elemental dragon god. The priesthood



the patron of Kammae. Indeed, Nethus has married Kammae's great goddess Hecate, and forgotten his first wife entirely. Some believe Nethus made a vow of service in exchange for his freedom.

Worshippers

Nethus is widely worshipped in Kammae Straboli, Capleon, Friula, and as far north as Bemmea, primarily by humans and to a lesser degree by minotaurs and elves. In ancient days, his faith was widespread in Ankeshel before it sank. Currently, his priesthood is growing and his followers are rebuilding his neglected temples and restoring and gilding his statues. Those who fish or dive for pearls are among his most devoted followers, but so are merchant captains, shipwrights, and netmakers, not to mention seafaring soldiers and the explorers of Barsella.

Symbols and Books

The most common symbol of Nethus is a fish or whale, and the second most common is the trident or hook. In his years of imprisonment, a chain was a symbol of the god's suffering, but this symbol has now been cast aside.

The works of Nethus are all contained in a single book, the Parables of the Sailing God. They are divided into practical advice on seafaring and fishing, more general advice on living the good life, and finally a mystical section called the Fisherman's Dream. This is sometimes presented as a separate volume.

Shrines and Priests

The two most famous shrines of Nethus are the Temple of the Ocean Moon in Kammae, and the Steps of the Sea in Capleon. The priests of Seggotan in Capleon were violently driven out, and Seggotan's dragonkin followers likewise suffered at the hands of an angry mob. The Temple of the Ocean Moon (once the site of the god's imprisonment) is now a seat of combined power, where Hecate and Nethus appear in visions as allies. Smaller shrines are common at every harbor, including Nuria Natal, the island holdings of Triolo, and along the coasts of the Seven Cities.

The high priest of Nethus is the Ocean Seer and priestess Qorette Mardefon, who lived in Valera as an adviser to the Emperor Loki V until quite recently. She now leads the reconstruction of the Steps of the Sea.

Masks

Dragonkin believe Nethus is nothing more than the human mask of Seggotan. Humans dispute this, of course, and claim the contrary, as Seggotan and even Wotan are masks of Nethus. Afew heretics claim that moon and sea are a single god, with their divine marriage proving the unity of Hecate and Nethus as a single divine figure in two forms. Mostly, these are druids who have indulged in too many ecstatic trances.

Other Faiths

Nethus is a newfound friend to Hecate, and a foe to the usurper Seggotan and the foul fire god Baal. He also sets his followers against Aten and Bastet.

The sea god's allies include the elven gods Yarila and Porevit, and the Goat of the Woods, whose followers believe the sea is a friend to the forces of chaos. Charun and Nethus are old friends, and some say brothers.

What Nethus Demands

Honor the tides and the moon. Learn to sail and fish and swim. Explore new lands to the west and east, and respect the seas. Make sacrifice before any voyage over water. Never forget that all waters return to the sea, and a dam can never hold a river for long.

DARK GODS

Some gods are forbidden, dangerous, and rapacious. They prey on their followers, extorting blood, gold, and sacrifices for power, health, and even life. These are the dark gods, the heretical masks, the blasphemous views into the corruption of the soul. Their temples are few, but their cults are more common than anyone thinks.

The dark gods rarely boast an overt presence in civilized lands, but their worshippers are everywhere. They are powerful and willing to destroy entire cities and kill other gods to regain the heights of their power. Some say these dark gods can be tamed and that each contains some seed of redemption, some remnant of goodness and light. Most of the time, any such seeds are difficult to see, and the entire idea of redeeming a dark god might be wishful and naive.

The dark gods offer power for blood and power for souls. They care little for followers, except insofar as those followers follow the dark gods' commands. In this, at least, they are all the same.

TABLE 12–7: DARK GODS

Name	Typical Worshippers
Addrikah	Derro, dwarves, the insane
Boreas	Giants, trolls, ogres
Chernobog	Murderers, hags, dragons
Goat of the Woods	Goblins, giants
The Hunter	Hunters, the bloodthirsty
Mammon	Merchants, the greedy
Marena	Vampires, vengeful, lustful
Vardesain	Darakhul, ghouls, vampires
White Goddess	Orcs, goblins, ogres

ADDRIKAH

Mother of Madness,
Lady of the White Bat,
Maker of the Black Road,
Voice of the Void, Patron of
the Derro

Divine Domains: Darkness, Death, Knowledge

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Favored Weapon: Battle axe

Addrikah appears as a strange elderly derro who babbles constantly; her voice is said to "spill wisdom," but her hymns are nonsense and her voice never answers followers directly. She is revered as the derro deliverer, who saved all derro from slavery through the gift of madness. She is also the derro's connection to more alien gods as an oracle and interpreter, but to other races she seems completely mad.

Despite her apparent age, Addrikah can crush skulls with her tiny
somehow tra
shriveled brai
gemstones ar
Her legends a
are disjointed
derro standar

Worshippe

Addrikah's pr
worshippers i
the derro, the
and deranged
and humans.

Symbols and Books

Addrikah's symbol is a white bat. She has no holy books.

Shrines and Priests

Addrikah has no formal shrines on the surface world, though exist in the underworld.

Masks

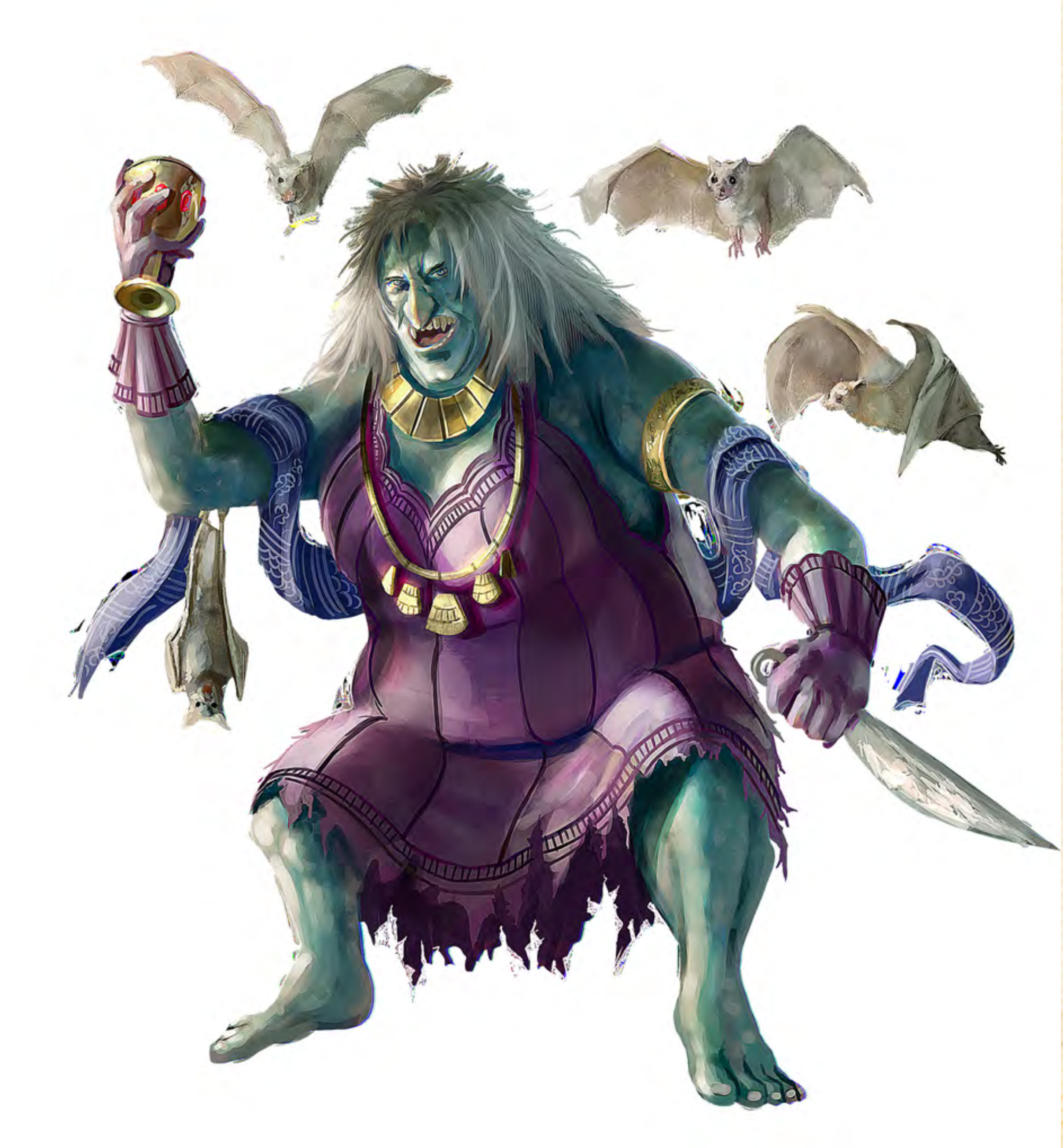
Some believe Addrikah is a mask of the Goat of the Woods. Most think she is a fallen demon lord.

Other Faiths

Addrikah is on good terms with Mammon, the Goat of the Woods, and the White Goddess. Some believe she had a long-standing tryst with Loki. All others are her enemies, especially Freyr and Freyja, Khors, and Thoth-Hermes.

What Addrikah Demands

The goddess of madness demands pure and unceasing insanity, chaos, and the baptism of all her followers' children into her mad cult. She encourages kidnappings and sacrifices from her followers, and forcing dwarves into



BOREAS

The Devouring Wind, God of the North Wind, Bringer of Storms and Killing Cold, Patron of the Giants

DIVINE DOMAINS: Tempest, Travel

ALIGNMENT: Chaotic Evil

FAVORED WEAPON: Pick

Boreas brings autumn storms and winter gales, and the biting wind carrying sleet, hail, and sno Son of the Winter Maiden Marena, his duty is t deliver his mother's killing cold to the world. It job he takes seriously.

Boreas aims to cover all of Midgard with eter winter, and prophecies foretell that he'll one da succeed. He works tirelessly to ensure that his c victory comes soon. From the highest mountai the North he brews storms and dispatches gian thuellai, yeti, and other minions southward. He sometimes worshipped as a mere herald of Mar (called Mara in the North), much to his chagrin

Boreas resembles a winged old man with shaggy hair and a wild beard—a cackling lunatic plagued by lust, paranoia, and rage. He enjoys shapeshifting, sometimes appearing as a living storm or a massive white stallion, dragon, or hawk—and occasionally in more seductive forms. In horse form he impregnates the free-roaming mares of the steppes, producing the Winterborn as well as the Khazzak ponies, both among the strongest, fastest, and toughest horses. Boreas also claims be the grandfather of all winter wolves and othe beasts. True or not, Northlanders curse his nam progenitor of all manner of evils.

WORSHIPPERS

Giants, trolls, and ogres are the most common of Boreas, as are evil dwarves, winter wolves, an goblin tribes. Nightgarms and fraughashar som become priests of Boreas.

SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

The symbol of Boreas is a circling line of wind. books are attributed to him.

SHRINES AND PRIESTS

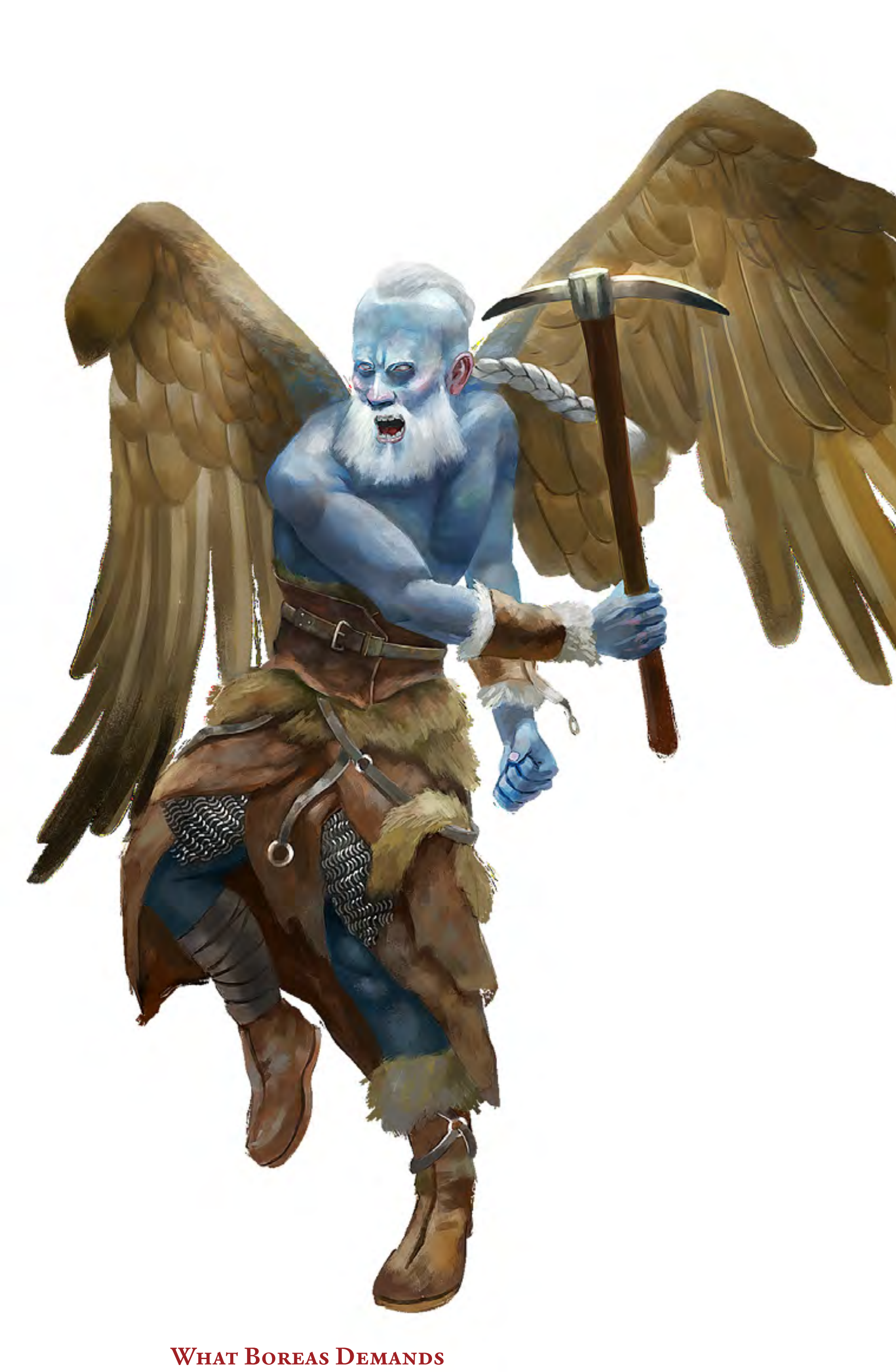
Boreas has few shrines, usually simple piles of s caverns near the tops of windy mountains. His priests are likewise few in number.

MASKS

Some believe that Boreas is an evil mask of Azuran or Chernobog.

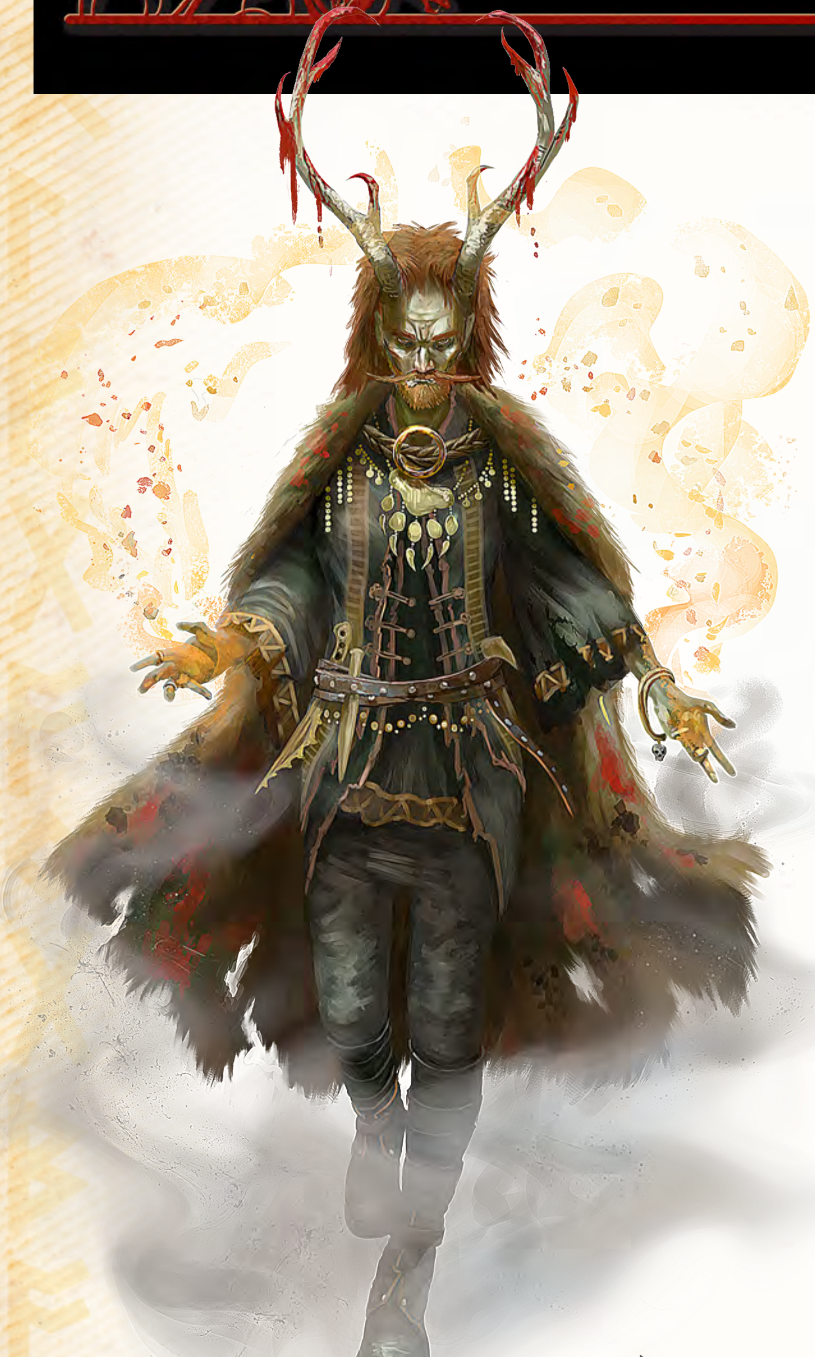
OTHER FAITHS

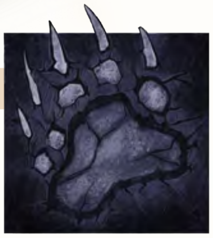
Boreas is on reasonably good terms with Chernobog



WHAT BOREAS DEMANDS

Boreas claims those who serve him will be spared when he achieves his victory. His demands are relatively direct: help destroy the power of other gods and cover all Midgard in winter storms. Worshippers must sacrifice creatures by exposing them naked to the winter night. They sabotage hearth fires and storehouses, and assist yeti, ice maidens, and other creatures to do Boreas's will. Theft is no crime for Boreas's followers, and burning the homes, hearths, and altars of his enemies is a sacred duty.





CHERNOBOG

The Black God, Lord of the Night, Master of Men, Architect of Disaster, God of Fears and Fires, Patron of Betrayers and Murderers

Divine Domains: Darkness, Death

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapon: Warhammer

Chernobog is the embodiment of all mortal fears, and his shape is variable and horrifying. He most often resembles an enormous black bear with horns and eyes like coals, his fur matted with blood and ichor. He is the master of the dead, not through respect but by compulsion; entire graveyards rise up in answer to his call. He is widely feared for his rapacious hungers and his raging strength, and even Mavros fears to fight him. Or so say the priests of Chernobog.

When Chernobog walks the earth in the dark of the moon and during eclipses, winds rise and howl, animals grow skittish and dogs bite, and ghosts rise from every grave. All foul deeds are ascribed to Chernobog.

Worshippers

Chernobog's followers include the corrupt and the vile, especially witches, sorcerers, and wizards, but also thieves, murderers, and bandits and those seeking power, revenge, or wealth. Hags, trolls, ogres, dragons, and goblins follow Chernobog as well, and commit murders in his name. Some say Baba Yaga is secretly Chernobog's greatest follower; others claim the two are rivals, or former lovers.

Symbols and Books

Chernobog's symbols are a black square and a bear's claw. He has no sacred texts, only oral histories and parables of destruction. The books found among his priests are practical works of ghost binding, torture, necromancy, and incantations to summon demons.

Shrines and Priests

The Black Spire stands tall in the hidden gnome city of Königsheim, and a small shrine of his rests in the king's palace in Morgau, called the Hidden Shrine of the Black Hand. Xanthus the Flenser keeps its altar well stained with blood and offers his services to those who require spies, assassins, and thieves.

But most temples of Chernobog are hidden, and those who visit them find that the priests are all too happy to hammer in their heads on the altar of sacrifice. Lo'dain the Lithe (CE male tiefling cleric 8 [Chernobog]), a son of the Master of Demon Mountain most often found in Vidim and along the Nieder Straits in a longboat rowed by zombie crew is counted as a great follower, as is Black Mother Yeva among the Khazzaki. By far his greatest priest is Sablehorns, the Metropolitan of Chernobog among the gnomes of Niemheim.

Masks

Some say that every dark god is a mask of Chernobog, since all evil and corruption is his. Others, less bombastic, say Sarastra is the elven mask of Chernobog, and the White Goddess is his mask to the white raiders and goblins, and Loki his mask in the Northlands. Some even say he is a sinister brother to Thor and Perun, the one whose hammer strikes down the just and the righteous.

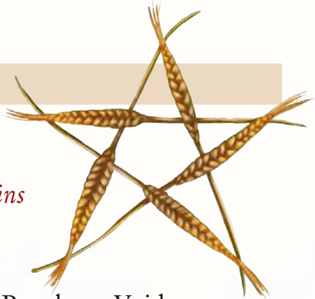
Other Faiths

Chernobog has few divine allies and few friends. Khors, Perun, Thor, and Lada are all his unremitting enemies, but some claim that Volund made Chernobog's hammer, and Hecate taught him how to take on the forms of bear and wolf, raven and vulture.

WHAT CHERNOBOG DEMANDS

Be strong, fight to take what you want, and never show mercy, pity, or forgiveness. The weak are less than you and should serve you, and as you are less than Chernobog, you must submit and serve him. Make blood sacrifices as often as you can; human sacrifices are best, followed by black animals.

GOAT OF THE WOODS



Queen of Decadence, Whisperer in the Woods, the Wicked One, Patron of the Goblins, the Mother Whose Loins Bring Forth Multitudes, Piper of the Midnight Sun, Father of Mayhem

DIVINE DOMAINS: Apocalypse, Prophecy, Void

ALIGNMENT: Chaotic

FAVORED WEAPONS: Garrote, throwing daggers

Once the greatest god and goddess of the magocracies, Bacchana was the deity of night, wealth, influence fertility, and power—a human and female elven Baccholon, with a completely transp priests gave her followers great license to form of excess, and the people of Caelmar Vael-Turog, and other magocracies embra teachings with all their hearts. When the lands first summoned servants from beyo church encouraged the endeavor and end that followed. The fight and its ever-increa expenditure of magic, wealth, and prayer her as nothing had before, but the atrociti of those wars tainted Bacchana as deeply homeland. With a deep lust for destructio looked to the realms beyond the stars whe Ancient Ones originated, and her soul and were broken.

The Goat of the Woods appears in two forms: as a hideous writhing, galloping crab covered with strange growths and tentacles, or (when seeking to not drive her followers directly into madness) as a hermaphrodite satyr with large curving horns and black skin clad in a wispy tunic of stars. Though referred to as "her," this goddess is as much male as female and an she takes blends the two genders.

WORSHIPPERS

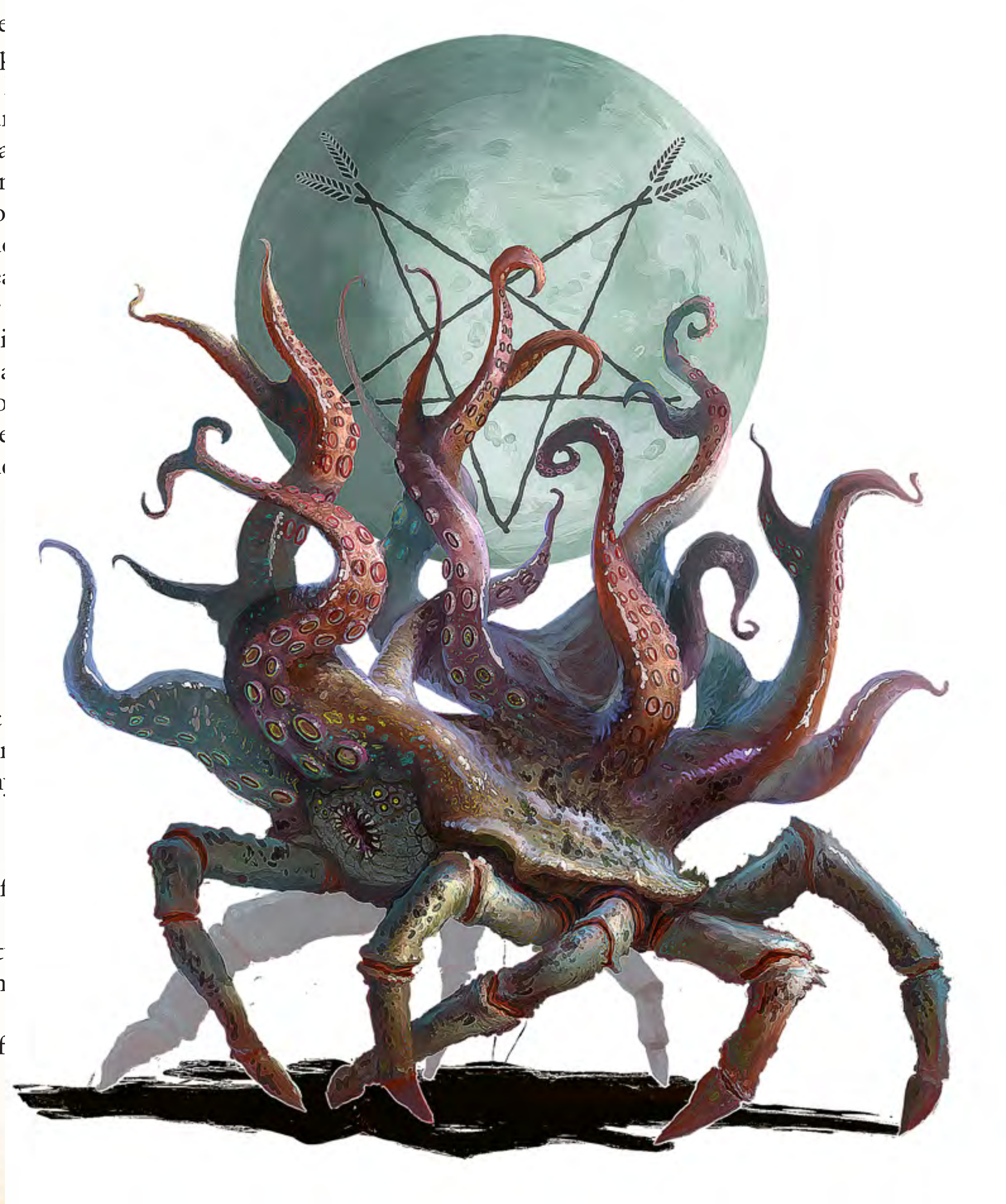
The power hungry, the mad, and the fear worship the Goat of the Woods. Anyone contemplating a risky or destructive vent looks to her for a blessing. The goblins an giants of the Wasted West turn to her in desperation and isolated communities of outcasts, outlaws, and the lost find her voice speaking to them in the night.

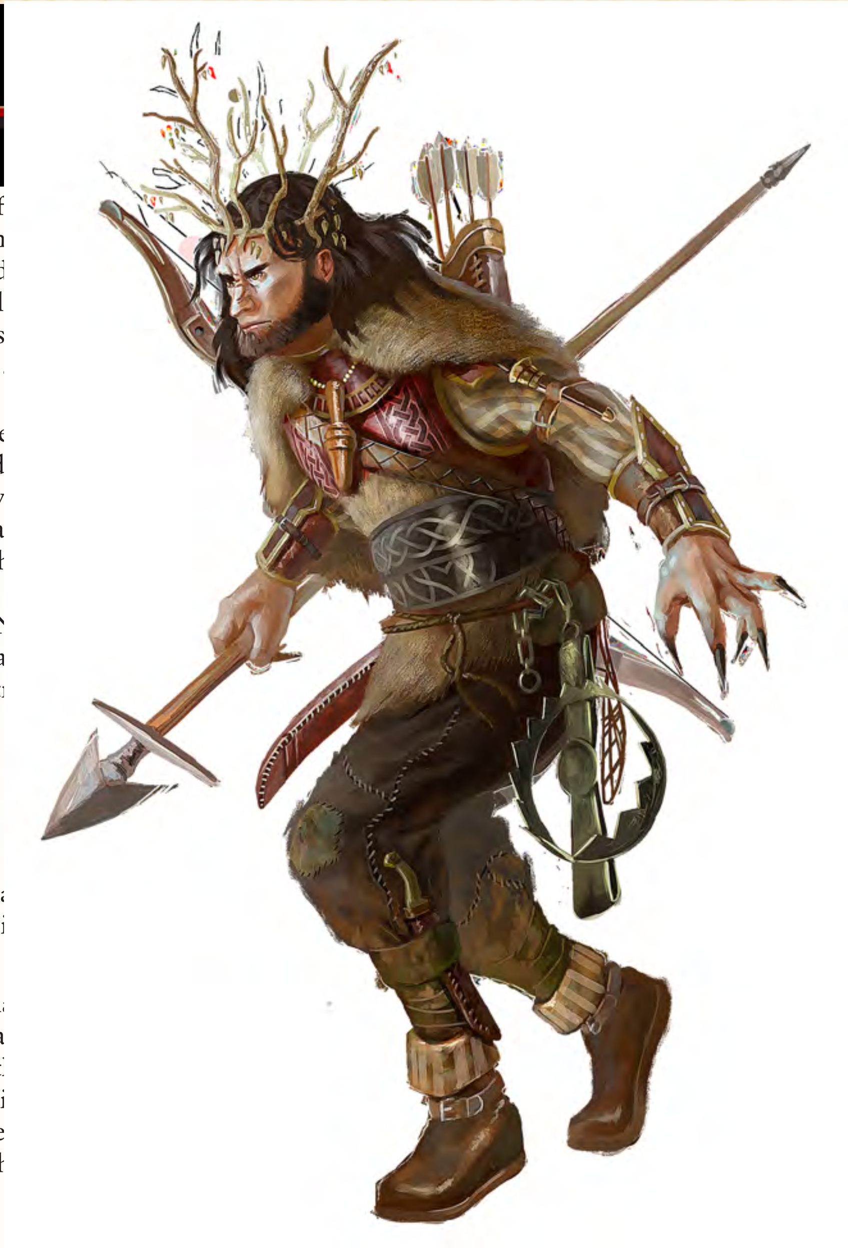
Lawful magic users the world over forbid worship of Bacchana. They struck her name from records, and burned her groves after the Mage Wars concluded. Wizards caught honoring her are exiled by their fellows, but are watched lest they mimic ancient obscenities. She is a major patron for witches and oracles, who sometimes call her by her ancient, forbidden names.

SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

The sign of the Goat is five stalks of golden wheat arranged in a pentagram. Worshippers' secret shrines use star-shaped objects such as starfish and star-shaped knives. A hand sign, the two middle fingers folded down over the thumb with the pinky and pointer fingers extended upward is a common , and easily hidden, gesture between followers.

Her long lost holy teachings were once stamped on rings worn by her clergy. Now the faithful listen for her whispers on the winds. One banned book, the *Viridian Codex*, is said to contain her litany. Only fragments are known to exist. (For more information on this volume, see *Demon Cults &*





Shrines and Priests

The Goat of the Woods was worshipped in groves of rowan and white oaks. During the purge of her faith these groves were burned and only the most isolated dangerous survive, though many cities retain a smal hidden shrine. The greatest of her surviving temples the Mother's Grove in the Ghostlight Forest, intact guarded by strange creatures.

The Goat's clergy are called speakers and they rav wherever they can find an ear to listen. Many consid cross-dressing an act of devotion, the more flamboy the better, and all her speakers challenge laws and ta as a duty of her faith. Her priests are advocates for t downtrodden and the exiled.

The current grand speaker is Tivishta Trikinta (C female goblin cleric 16 [Goat of the Woods]). She wa the Wastes and the Ghostlight Forest, sometimes st into the Grand Duchy or the Seven Cities.

Masks

In the magocracies of old, Bacchana was said to be the sister or a mask of Red Marena and Sarastra; the three were the Dark Sisters, opposing Ceres, Hecate, and Lada. Now, Loki, Ninkash, and Vardes whispered to be her masks, as is Emari among the g

Other Faiths

The Goat of the Woods is as capricious now as she h been and is an ally, enemy, lover, friend, confidant, a betrayer to any god that associates with her. The fait Khors, Aten, Sarastra, and Hecate are all her comm enemies, though the Goat pays them little mind. He true enemies are the Ancient Ones of the Wastes, wh she hates, fears, and lusts after.

What the Goat of the Woods Demands

Gain power and satisfy your vices and lusts. Expand your mind's boundaries with whatever means you have available, but especially with magic. Madness is the blessing of your goddess. Challenge the law and bring forth new visions. Embrace change and destroy hierarchies.

THE HUNTER

Master of the Hunt, the Horned Huntsman, the Blood God, the Horseman, the Many-Skinned Walker, the God-Wolf, Patron of the Bandit Centaurs

Divine Domains: Death, Hunting, Moon

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapon: Boar spear, bow (any)

The Hunter goes by many names—Cherne, Kirme, Huern, Ebern, Herion—and every tribe calls him their own. He walks in countless forms, including dire wolf, human huntsman, fell hound, centaur archer, pale king, fey assassin, blood demon, and goblin trapper. The god embodies the ancient and deadly animals lurking in the wild fringes, and those who chase and conquer them. The Blood God encourages the dark instincts that drive beasts to red fury and the kill. The Hunter revels in the chase and thrives on power, violence, and blood.

The Hunter appears with a crown of horns or claws, a rich fur cloak and deerskin leggings, and carrying a black-tipped spear. The Hunter's eyes flash green and gold.

Worshippers

The Hunter has ancient roots, and his priests lead or influence the most violent centaur clans and bandit gangs. For the fey, the hunt is an undeniable, timeless rite. When the Hunter rides forth, all those who hear must heed his call to hunt—even fey gods have been enraptured by it. Mighty Wotan and Perun once rode at the head of the pack beside the Hunter, in ages past.

The Blood God enjoys a large following of human hunters and dwarven reavers as well as elves, lycanthropes, vampires, ogres, shadow fey, worgs, winter wolves, and hobgoblin, orc, and goblin tribes. The Hunter's church has grown even among aristocrats of the civilized nations. Forming Blood Lodges, they follow the Hunter's doctrine for sport as well as for assassination of personal enemies.

SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

Every manner of predatory beast, monstrous and mundane, is a symbol of the many-skinned Hunter, and his primary symbol is a bloodied carcass. Other symbols include stylized spear and arrow heads, particularly if the Horned One's nature must remain hidden. Observant prey can find such symbols as omens or warnings.

The Hunter's faith spreads through oral tradition, in campfire conversions between hunters. Written texts are rare, though sacred lore is hidden in manuals such as The Slaying and Field Dressing of Northern Beasts. Books are feeble guides to embracing the Horned God; believers must experience real bloodlust before they understand the Hunter's call.

SHRINES AND PRIESTS

Every bloodied hunting ground is a shrine to the Hunter. Full temples are rare, although worshippers consecrate formal shrines in remote woods or secluded valleys. Piled with the bones and skins of deer or boar, these shrines are painted red with their gore. Less grisly altars with bone offerings are dedicated in the Blood Lodges, exclusive hunting fraternities in less savage regions, such as the Grand Duchy of Dornig or the province of Krakovar. His shrines in Krakovar now stand in the open air, where once they were hidden in dark groves.

Elite huntsmen known as the herls lead the Lodges. Their chief is Red Marcken (NE male human cleric 7 [the Hunter]), who survived an encounter with a great mother bear, leaving blood scars scrawled across his body. Among the fey, a respected but quite dangerous Fey Lord of the Hunt leads the rites of the Hunter.

MASKS

Despite the occasional association with other gods, the Wild Hunter's priests claim their god wears no masks, though others believe that Vardesain, Mavros, the Goat of the Woods, or the Red Goddess Marena are aspects of the Hunter. Some of his names are taken from gods that became his prey. Among the giants, he is called Sugaar.

Mortals who ride with the Wild Hunt for too long, such as St. Hubertus, gain a measure of immortality and divine power, and some espouse a tamer hunter ethos. The Horned One tolerates them because in they still promote the hunt.

OTHER FAITHS

To the Huntsman there are only two kinds of gods. The worthy are fellow hunters who join him on his great chases, their followers as their yeomen and attendants.

All other gods are meat. Their clergy, their fawns, are also meat, all the sweeter in their mortal suppleness.

WHAT THE HUNTER DEMANDS

Kill without hesitation. No one has truly lived until they have taken life and let the blood scent fill the air as they gut and drain a kill. Hunt or be hunted. Join the Master's Hunt when it rides by, and hunt boar, deer, pheasant, and rabbits in season. Learn to track, learn to kill, and eat what you kill. Know that your life too might someday come to a violent end, and live well before that day.

MAMMON

Lord of Greed, the Golden God, Master of Lord of Coinage, Greed, Hoarding, and Treasures, Patron God of Miners and Unscrupulous Merchants

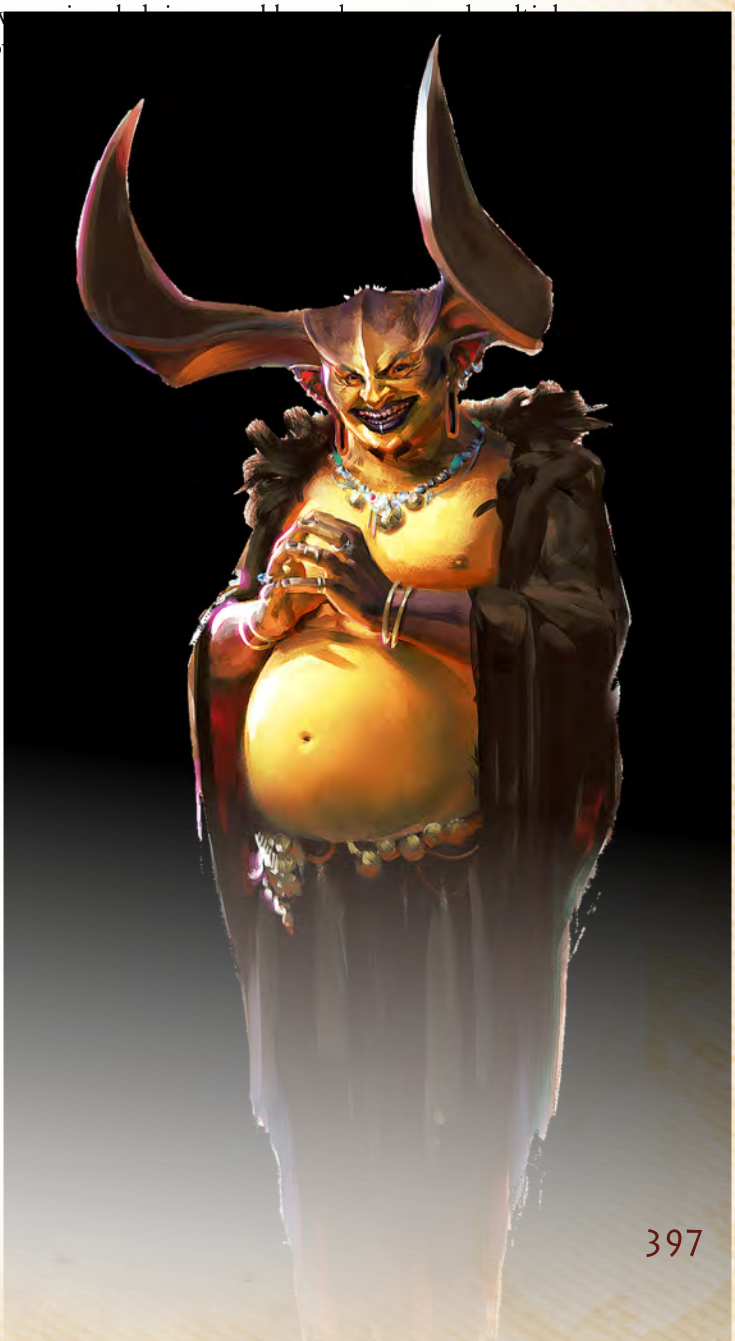
DIVINE DOMAINS: Darkness, Hunger, Lust, Mountain, Travel

ALIGNMENT: Evil

FAVORED WEAPON: Great axe

Mammon is an enormously fat devil with golden skin, horns, and a mouth capable of the widest smile, able and willing to devour the world. His clawed hands can hold enormous barrels, chests, and even entire treasuries; he

cro



Mammon's greed and lust for more, more, and yet more are unbounded and unstoppable. No matter how great the offerings given to him, he always looks to the next.

Worshippers

All those who lust after wealth are Mammon's faithful, but his creed is especially common among humans, dwarves, and dragons. A coterie of gilded devils pursue his goals throughout the world.

Symbols and Books

Mammon's books are books of accounts and lists of treasures. He has no sacred text, though there are hymnals: hymns for the Acquisition of Glorious Wealth and Praise of Gold are the two most common.

Mammon's symbol is three gold coins.

Shrines and Priests

Shrines to Mammon are rarely public, but instead hidden in counting houses and merchant's residences, in the halls of treasurers and dwarven misers, and even in the vaults and mints of kings.

Masks

Charun, Chernobog, and even Rava and Ceres are sometimes claimed as masks of Mammon.

Other Faiths

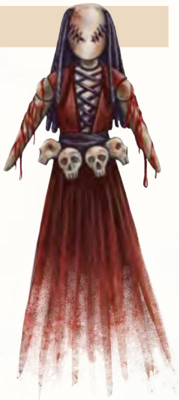
Mammon hates all the ascetic and humble faiths, considering them weak and spineless. He is closely allied with Marena the Red and with devils such as Asmodeus and Totivillus.

What Mammon Demands

Coinage, wealth, and yet more wealth! The corruption of officials, greater trade through bribery and false dealing, and the increase in temple treasuries through any means necessary. Each day grow richer, and make sacrifices to Mammon, and learn how to profit from others through fair means or foul.

Marena

Red Goddess of Winter, Lust, Sickness, and Death, the Blood Maiden, the Winter Maiden, Patron of the Greater Duchy of Morgau



Divine Domains: Death, Justice, Lust

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapon: Spear, whip

Marena is the dark face of human fears: all flesh fails, and unbridled lust and rampant plague can destroy any happy life. She is known and feared throughout the Crossroads (and in the North as Mara), and her cults flourish in secret, especially in small villages when times are hard. In the great cities, her followers meet in cellars and sanctuaries within the poorer districts.

Her face is both beautiful and chilling, and those who see her and survive are invariably marked with white hair, wine-colored birthmarks, or haunted silver eyes. Her followers believe that her strict worship grants them power, and her orders in the Greater Duchy of Morgau include anchorites, flagellants, and orgiasts.

Worshippers

Marena is popular north of the river Argent in the Greater Duchy of Morgau, and she serves as the patron goddess of whores, vampires, ghouls, and the Order of Ghost Knights. Indeed, she is worshipped openly in the Blood Kingdom, and the vampires are building new temples to her glory in Krakovar. She is followed with somewhat less fervor on the Rothenian Plain in her aspect as the Winter Maiden, and hidden sects of her adherents exist throughout the Crossroads and the Seven Cities.

Some kobolds worship her out of fear or awe, although most prefer the simple faiths of Volund or Baal.

Symbols and Books

Marena's symbols include all red garments and skulls stained with ochre or rust. Her books are banned in most places as treatises of corruption and illness. The most infamous volumes include the Book of Holy Lust, the Song of Blood & Winter, and the Scarlet Commandments.

Shrines and Priests

The greatest public shrine to Marena is the great Aprostala temple, a site of pilgrimage and daily sacrifices in the Barony of Doresh. Worship of Marena is frequent and public; offerings are loud and messy. Every Morgau, Krakovar, and Doresh village of any size displays at least a small blood-stained altar stone, and her name is invoked at every birth, funeral, and battle. The religion is one of the few ways for living men and women to rise in status in the Blood Kingdom. Everywhere else, her worship is in secret.

Marena's priesthood is the Red Sisterhood, responsible for justice, law, and punishment. The strict Red Sisters dole out punishments both harsh and public: floggings, quarterings, and brandings are all common, as are executions by beheading. The high priestess Lileshka of the Chalice rarely executes followers and visitors, but attempts to seduce pilgrims when the goddess demands it. Those who permit this are granted an audience to petition for whatever they wish. Those who refuse are given to the harsher priests for chastisement.

Despite (or because of) her proclivities, the high priestess retains the respect and good opinion of many of the elders of the realm. Her offerings are generous and yet she always demands favors in return. Most who underestimate her soon learn that her public congress with men and women does not mean she is weak or easily led; to the contrary, she chooses her conquests carefully.

Masks

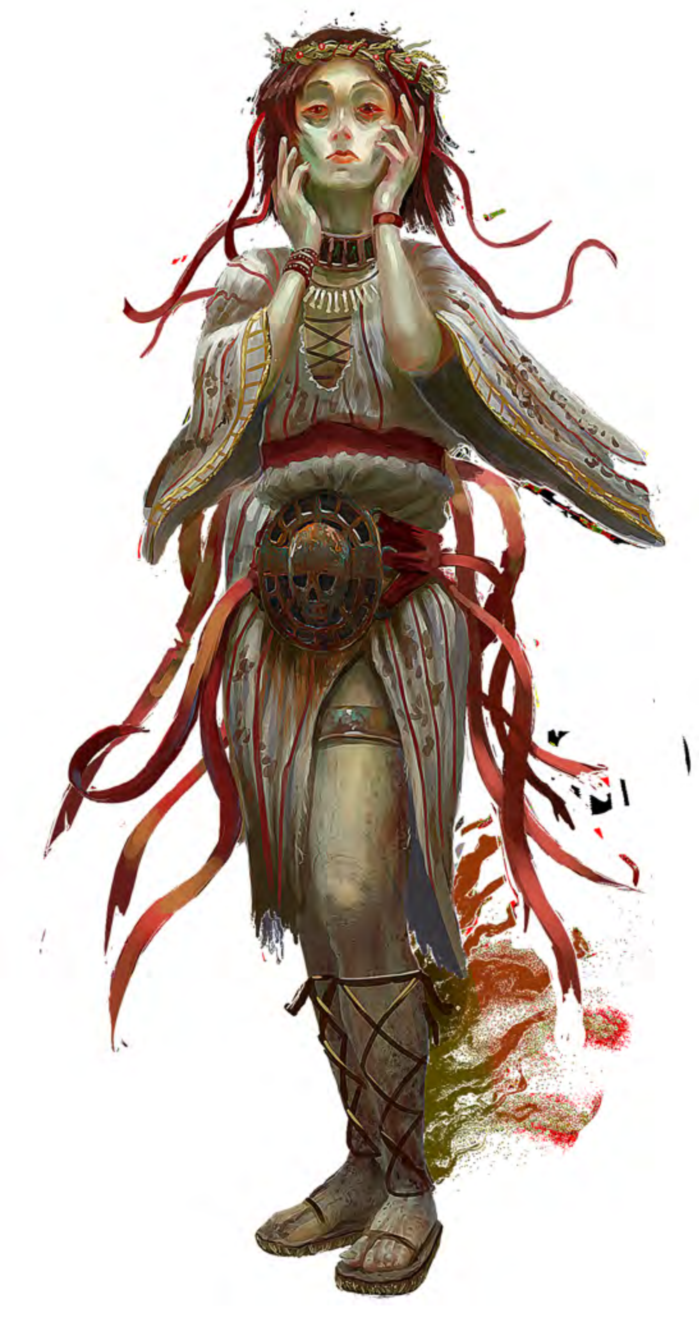
Marena might be a mask of Hecate, Sarastra, or the Goat of the Woods; these are sometimes referred to as her "dark sisters." In many ways, though, Vardesain is closer to the goddess than Hecate or Sarastra.

Other Faiths

Marena is on excellent terms with the priests of her husband Mavros, and with Boreas, who is widely regarded as their son (at least in the Northlands). Marena is on poor terms with most other gods. Boreas and the Goat of the Woods are her allies, and some believe she has a secret pact with Vardesain as well. Her enemies include Rava, Aten, Khors, Lada, Sif, Ninkash, and Wotan.

What Marena Demands

The stern goddess of lust and death demands her followers kill her foes (especially followers of Lada) and she requires rites of seduction, blood sacrifice, and flagellation. Although her worship is harsh and bitter, she is not unrelentingly cruel: she grants strength and magical power far more often than other gods, even to those who are not priestesses. Marena's followers must make a pilgrimage to Morgau if they attain the age of 50.



Vardesain

Ghoul-God of the Bottomless Maw, Lord of Unending Thirst, the Hunger God, the Unsated God, Devourer of Souls, Patron of the Darakhul

Divine Domains: Darkness, Death, Hunger, Life, Void

Alignment: Neutral

Favored Weapon: Hand axe

All creatures hunger, and without food, life ends. Vardesain took this primal need and built a faith ranging from simple gluttony to cannibal feasting. Indeed, food is seen as a sacrament that builds life, health, and righteous strength in the faithful, and the followers of the hunger god can be both great gourmands and the world's least picky eaters. Sacrifices to the god are invariably edible—and sometimes still living.

The god's best-known forms are those of scavengers and predators: white wolves, ghouls, and darakhul, but also undead of abnormal size. In any form, visions, depictions, and avatars of Vardesain are always feeding on something.

Worshippers

Vardesain's followers are the hungry and the ambitious: power-hungry humans, monsters, and ghouls, vampires, darakhul, and the undead. They have no morals or standards, only instinct.

Symbols and Books

Vardesain's holy beast is the purple worm, a creature that devours sacrifices to the god in his temples. When embroidered or painted on vestments, it is shown as a purple snake consuming its own tail or a pair of open jaws. The priests of Vardesain keep bats, serpents, and oozes as living incarnations of hunger.

Their holiest text is actually a series of cave paintings called "the Feast" rendered in the Shrine of Vardesain in Darakhan, the White City of the Ghoul Imperium.

The empire depends on the Feeding Laws, edicts written on scrolls of skin and carried by Vardesain's priests. To disobey the Feeding Laws is to invite divine punishment, though in practice they are frequently broken.

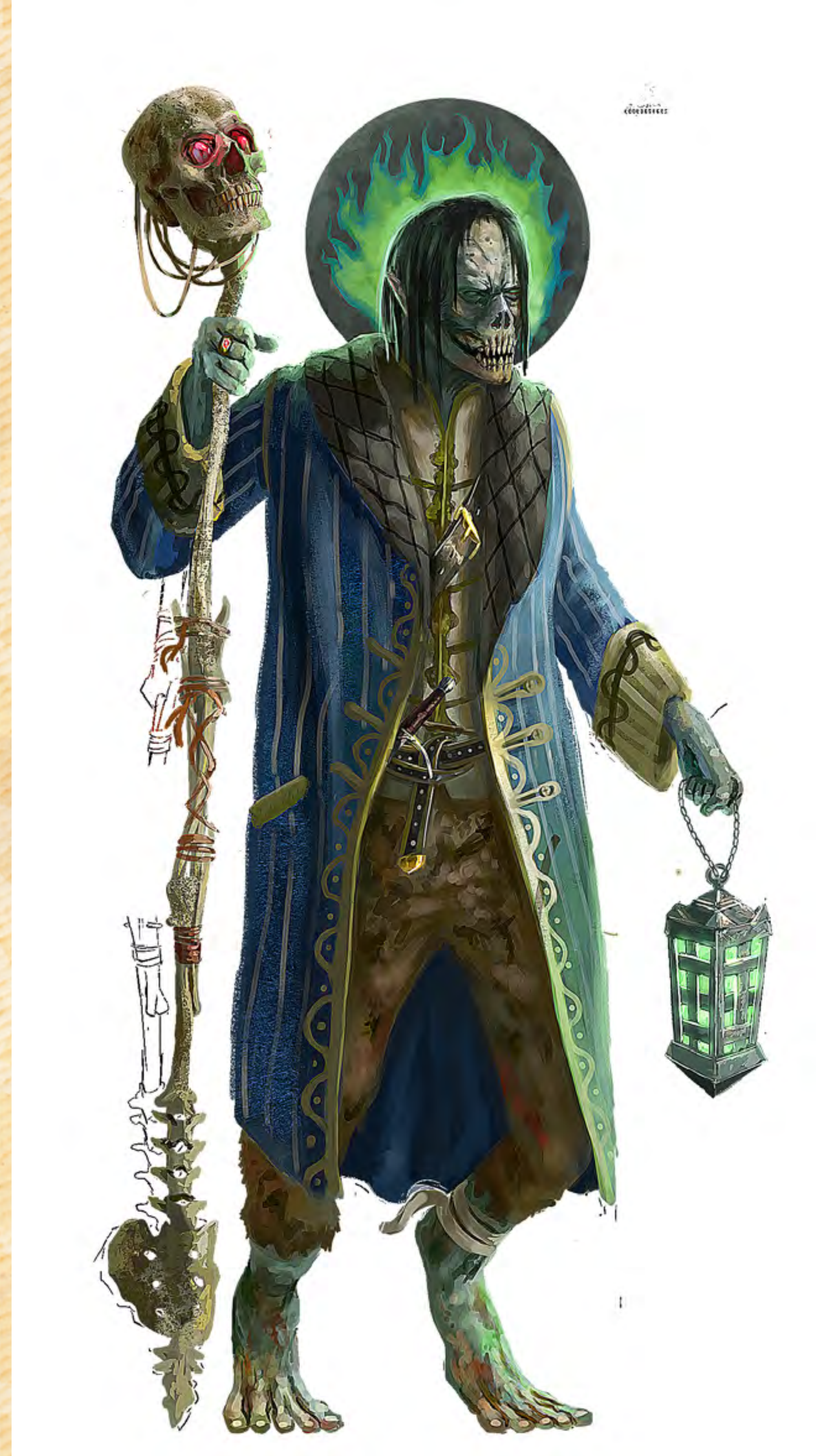
Shrines and Priests

The red and white Shrine of Vardesain is the best-known temple below ground. Many ancient monuments to his face as the Lord of Unending Thirst stand at oases in the Southlands.

The current high priest is Cimbrai (NE male darakhul cleric 12 [Vardesain]), one of the rare few whose hunger has been consumed by Vardesain as a blessing. He currently works to topple Anu-Akma's church in the Ghoul Empire.

Masks

The Goat of the Woods, the Hunter, Hel, Fenris-Hati, and Mavros have all been suggested as possible masks of Vardesain. None are especially likely candidates;



Chernobog and Charun are more associated with Vardesain's underworld and control over the undead. A few think that the Hunger God is a mask of Veles, and the priests of Vardesain claim that their god devoured an older god named Mordiggian, whose name sometimes still appears in their liturgy.

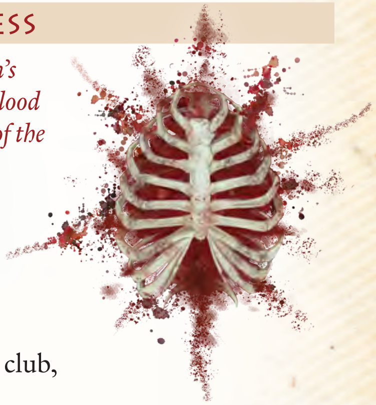
Other Faiths

Chernobog, the Goat of the Woods, and the Hunter are allied with Vardesain, though loosely. Lada, Khors, and Perun all despise Vardesain as worthless and vile, and they seek to destroy his temples at every opportunity. The priesthoods of Vardesain and Anu-Akma are great rivals, t the two gods seem indifferent to this rivalry, leading me to suspect that Vardesain is indeed a mask of Anu- ma's darker side.

hat Vardesain Demands

esh is weak, but your will is strong: show your strength. int and kill what you eat when you can; scavenging not dishonorable. Fast when you must find focus and rity, for your hunger will give you strength to see the y. Devour the hearts of your enemies.

he White Goddess



ddess of Bright Pain, the Sun's
een, the Pale Matriarch of Blood
d Strength, Patron Goddess of the
hite Shadows

vine Domains: pocalypse, Darkness, eath, Hunting, Void

ignment: Evil

vored Weapons: Great club, mple sword

e White Goddess was born with pale skin and red eyes. hen she emerged from her people's home beneath the n of the world, the sun god Khors challenged her with radiance. She would not be intimidated and stared n down, chasing him as he ran, until he hid beyond horizon. Along the way she crushed his subjects, the n-kissed races, and tore out their bones, feasting on the arrow and armoring her flesh. Every time the sun sneaks ck over the horizon she chases him away and her faithful low after each night, tearing the flesh of the sunlit races d offering up bones and screams in tribute.

She is a battle goddess who embodies the harshness of , the sun's cruel heat and blinding radiance. She is the ll to go on and the blessed rest that comes to those who rn their indolence.

The White Goddess appears as a massive albino orc, th red eyes that glow like embers and intricately carved sks. She wears crude bone armor and carries a massive b in one hand and equally large sword in the other.

orshippers

Her primary worshippers are the savage and failing race of orcs, once numerous but now eking out their survival in the depths of the earth and the farthest reaches of mountain, forest, and desert. Tales of their viciousness bring other savage peoples to the worship of their brutal goddess: goblins, derro, ogres, even kobolds and centaurs sometimes venerate her.

Symbols and Books

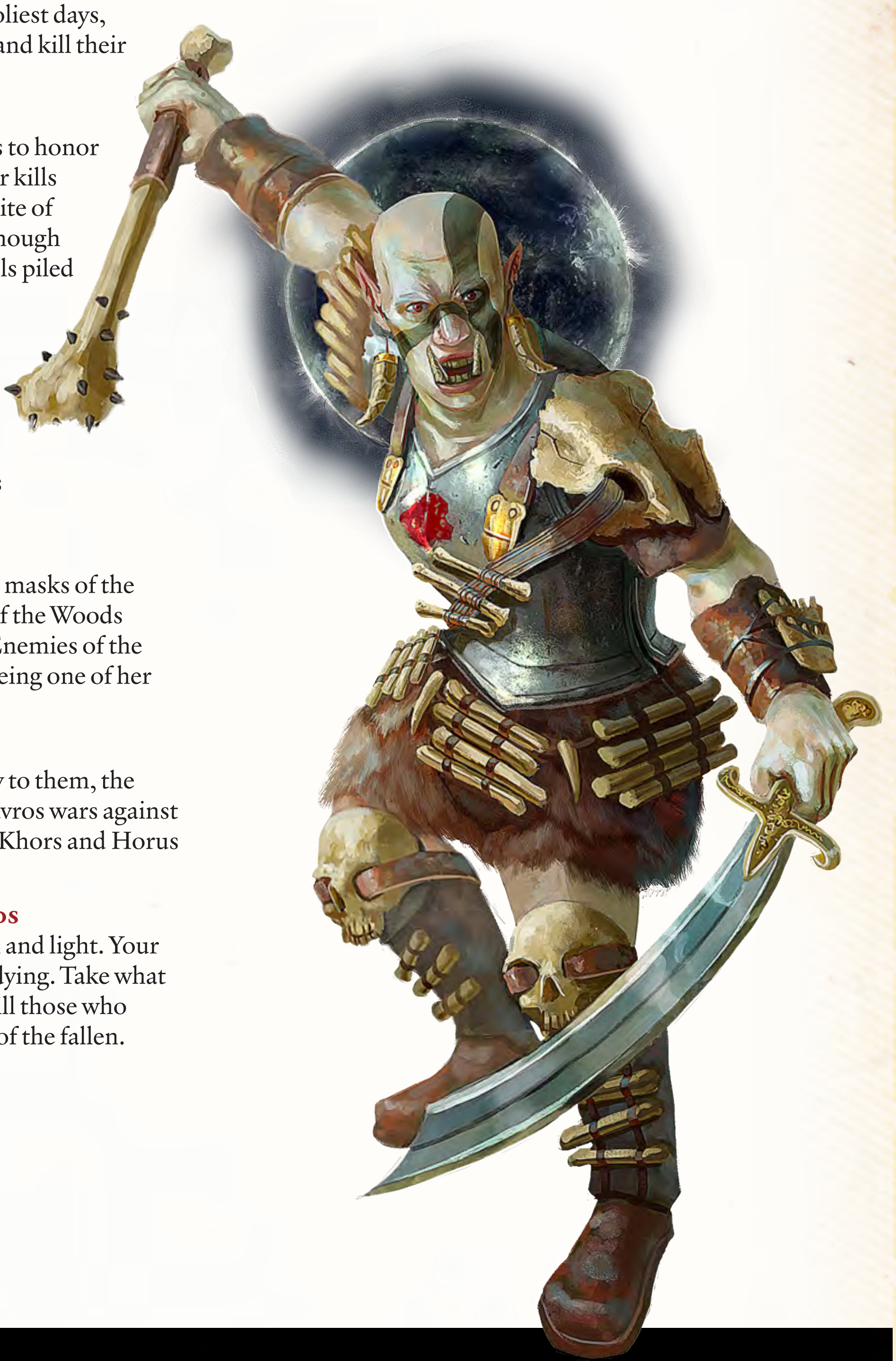
The White Goddess's most recognized symbol is a sun-like splatter of blood on a white field. Other symbols include a red skeleton, a skull with tusks, and a black sun.

[redacted] Sun's Eye, inscribed with ritual tortures for sun-blessed races. Her priests say it was torn out of the sun or the sun god's skull. Proof comes to the faithful when the sun turns its empty socket toward the lands below in what the other races call a solar eclipse. These are the holiest days, when the orcs rise from the wild to raid and kill their enemies.

Shrines and Priests

The orcs and others build altars of bones to honor their goddess. Any creature a worshipper kills has its bones removed and piled on the site of its death. These are her only holy sites, though there are rumors of a Great Fane of Skulls piled high with 10,000 sacrifices, somewhere deep within the Green Abyss of the Southlands.

Her current high priest is war chief Jagger Ungligger (CN male goblin barbarian 6/cleric 9) in the White Mountain Marches, though she also has many priests in the Southlands.



Masks

Multiple Lords of Hell are said to be the masks of the White Goddess, and likewise the Goat of the Woods is sometimes rumored to be her mask. Enemies of the heretical church of Aten accuse him of being one of her masks as well.

Other Faiths

Other than strange orc gods known only to them, the White Goddess has no known allies. Mavros wars against her whenever her followers appear, and Khors and Horus are her implacable enemies.

What the White Goddess Demands

Kill your enemies. Do not shy from pain and light. Your goddess's names are the screams of the dying. Take what is yours from the weak, and enslave or kill those who challenge your rule. Pile high the bones of the fallen.

[redacted]

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Weight	Properties
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

CHARACTER OPTIONS

An adventurer's background, features, and class option help establish a unique place in the world of Midgard. The options presented here are available at your discretion; some are meant to make NPCs more interesting, rather than to enhance player characters.

BACKGROUND: GNOLL CARAVAN RAIDER

Gnolls are found in large numbers throughout the Southlands. While many are "civilized" and join local armies to fight as shock troops, their more savage cousins often roam the deserts and wilderness preying on caravans. Gnolls are accomplished caravan raiders, attacking with stealth, creating chaos and panic, and then slipping away with the plunder before the merchants and their guards can react. While some gnoll raiders follow Bastet or her jackal-headed husband Anu-Akma, the worst of them have turned to the dark god Laughing Nkishi or have joined the vile Doomspeakers cult.

d8	Personality Trait
1	I just need one more big score, and then I can give up raiding caravans for good.
2	It's a good idea to scout first, charge second.
3	I could never live in the city. I only sleep well under the desert stars.
4	I try not to leave any witnesses alive.
5	I have no time for weak-minded fools.
6	These fat, oily merchants need the money much less than I do.
7	Biting off a finger or two usually gets them to tell me where they've hidden the loot.
8	I love the smell of freshly spilled blood on the sand.

d6	Ideal
1	**Cunning.** I like to stay at least two steps ahead of my allies, and three steps ahead of my enemies. (Any)
2	**Hedonism.** Have a good time, all the time. (Chaotic)
3	**Greed.** I see what I want and then I take it. (Evil)
4	**Family.** I raid caravans to make sure my family doesn't starve. (Neutral)
5	**Independence.** No one tells me what to do. (Chaotic)
6	**Might.** Nkishi rewards the strong and punishes the weak. (Evil)

Gnoll raiders like throwing alchemist's fire, smoke bombs, and other homemade concoctions to wreak havoc when they raid a caravan. They favor giant hyenas as mounts.

Skill Proficiencies: Acrobatics, Intimidation

Tool Proficiencies: Alchemist's supplies

Languages: One of your choice

Equipment: A flask of alchemist's fire, an annotated map of the desert showing the most popular caravan routes, a trophy from your most successful raid, a set of traveler's clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: DESERT RAT

You know the caravan routes and oases of the Southlands like the back of your hand, and your experience in stealing from caravans allows you to quickly search through trade goods and other plunder. You can move at a fast travel pace through the desert without taking the usual –5 penalty to your passive Wisdom (Perception) score. Additionally, you gain advantage on Intelligence (Investigation) checks to work out which items in a group are the most valuable.

d6	Bond
1	I lost my father's scimitar on a raid and will not rest until I win it back.
2	Soon, I will be considered worthy to read the Book of Nine Dooms.
3	I would gladly lay down my life for my pack mates.
4	My daughter is living somewhere in the city of Per-Bastet and I need to find her to apologize.
5	One day I will travel south to Dabu and pledge my service to the Ama of the Gnolls.
6	I took part in a bloody raid on a caravan of peaceful pilgrims and still feel guilty to this day.

d6	Flaw
1	I like to feast on the entrails of my enemies. Mmmm, tasty!
2	I abhor senseless violence.
3	I try and get away with doing as little as possible.
4	If I hear music, I can't help but to howl along.
5	If the odds are against me, I don't stick around.
6	I'm incapable of sticking to a plan.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

While gnoll raiders are robbers and few could be considered kind-hearted, some are more savage and bloodthirsty than others who may possess one—maybe even two—redeeming features. Gnolls are generally bullies, preying on those weaker than themselves and grudgingly obeying those that are stronger. Ideals and bonds are often shaped by the god the raider follows.

ANTIPALADIN CLASS FEATURES

A paladin on the path toward swearing the Oath of the Giving Grave manifests some class features differently from other paladins.

UNHOLY SMITE

replaces Divine Smite

Starting at 2nd level, when you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack, you can expend one paladin spell slot to deal necrotic damage in addition to the weapon's damage. The extra damage is 2d8 for a 1st-level spell slot, plus 1d8 for each slot level higher than 1st, to a maximum of 5d8. The total damage increases by another 1d8 if the target is a celestial, a Good-aligned fey, or a Good-aligned dragon.

IMPROVED UNHOLY SMITE

replaces Improved Divine Smite

By 11th level, you are so suffused with Evil that all your melee weapon strikes cause necrotic damage. When you hit with a melee weapon, the target creature takes an extra 1d8 necrotic damage. If you also use your Unholy Smite, this damage adds to the extra damage of the Unholy Smite.

SACRED OATH: THE GIVING GRAVE

The giving grave is more a philosophy than a formalized code. It appeals to warriors who value power above life, to would-be conquerors who balk at nothing when imposing their will on the weak, to warlords who seek to extend their reigns beyond the usual limit of a single lifetime, and, frankly, to psychotic killers who crave the stamp of divine approval on their bloodletting.

Conquer Death. Immense power is needed to repair what's wrong with the world, and mortal beings' lives are too short to acquire that power and wield it effectively. Therefore, death itself must be overcome, and the only path beyond death is through the grave.

Serve Those Who Can Teach. To overcome death, one must serve and learn from those who have that knowledge, regardless of one's views about those entities. When they have no more to teach and no further aid to give, only then can the student's moral feelings come into play.

Brook No Opposition. Your vision for the world is correct, and the path to achieving it is narrow and treacherous. A single misstep could lead to disaster. Anyone who obstructs that path imperils the future and, therefore, deserves neither life nor mercy. This isn't cruelty; it's necessity. Where possible, those who fall can be redeemed by being made to serve your ambition after their deaths.

Honor the Gods of Death. Honor the gods who grant you power over life and death with devotion and sacrifice so that they will aid you and look favorably on you as an instrument of their power, or even as an ally. Punish those who blaspheme against them.

OATH OF THE GIVING GRAVE SPELLS

Paladin Level	Spells
3	*blood tide*, disguise self*
5	*blood armor*, bloodshot**
9	*animate dead, vampiric touch*
13	*blight, freedom of movement*
17	*insect plague, seeming*

**indicates a spell contained in this book*

CHANNEL DIVINITY

When you take this oath at 3rd level, you gain the following two Channel Divinity options.

Overawe Enemy. As an action, you present your unholy symbol and utter a promise of horrors to come, using your Channel Divinity. Choose one creature within 60 feet of you that you can see. That creature must make a Wisdom saving throw, unless it is immune to being stunned. Celestials and Good-aligned fey have disadvantage on the saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is stunned for 1 minute or until it takes any damage.

Mark of the Funeral Feast. As a bonus action, you can shout a command and indicate a creature you can see within 10 feet of you, using your Channel Divinity. All unintelligent undead below Challenge Rating 1 who are within sight of the creature become compelled to pursue and attack it. The effect ends in 1 minute or when the target creature drops to 0 hit points or falls unconscious. When the effect ends, the undead return to what they were doing before.

AURA OF THE UNREPENTANT

Starting at 7th level, you and allies within 10 feet of you can't be turned while you are conscious. At 18th level, the radius of this aura increases to 30 feet.

TENACIOUS LIFE

Starting at 15th level, you gain regeneration. If you start your turn with fewer than half of your maximum hit points, you regain 5 hit points. If you take fire or radiant damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of your next turn.

UNDYING SENTINEL

At 20th level, you gain magic resistance; you have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects. In addition, if you are killed, you rise from the grave within 1d4 days as a death knight. Consult your GM for implementation.

LUST DOMAIN

The Lust domain concerns itself with desire, sex, and awakening passion in others. Bastet, Freyr and Freyja, and Mammon have lust in their portfolios; but Marena, the Red Goddess, is the most popular and infamous goddess of lust in Midgard. Her sacred *Book of Holy Lust*, banned in most cities, is read in secret by those outside the Goddess's priestesses and adherents for its explicit sexual advice and graphic woodcut illustrations covering all manner of exotic proclivities. Clerics of lust often seek to seduce others with their wiles, either for their own pleasure, to lure them into a cult, or otherwise manipulate them into doing the cleric's bidding.

LUST DOMAIN SPELLS

Cleric Level	Spells
1st	*charm person, command*
3rd	*alter self, suggestion*
5th	*hypnotic pattern, throes of ecstasy**
7th	*compulsion, lovesick**
9th	*dominate person, kiss of the succubus**

**indicates a spell in this book*

GIFTS OF LUST

At 1st-level, you learn the *friends* cantrip. You also gain proficiency in one of the following skills of your choice: Deception, Performance, or Persuasion.

CHANNEL DIVINITY: LUSTFUL GAZE

Starting at 2nd level, you can use your Channel Divinity to instil fascination and lust in others. As an action, you speak seductively and gaze lasciviously at creatures of your choice within 30 feet who can see and hear you. Those targets which fail their Wisdom saving throw are compelled to approach where you can hold them in rapt attention for one minute or until you stop speaking, whichever comes first. While you command their attention, the targets have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to perceive any creature other than you, and you have advantage on Charisma (Deception) or (Persuasion) checks to further influence their behaviour.

LINGERING SEDUCTION

Starting at 6th level, you can keep the targets of your Lustful Gaze spellbound with lust for up to ten minutes as long as you continue to speak to them.

DIVINE STRIKE

Starting at 8th level, you gain the ability to infuse your weapon strikes with divine energy. Once on each of your turns, when you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can cause the attack to deal an extra 1d8 psychic damage to the target. When you reach 14th level the extra damage increases to 2d8.

MASTER OF SEDUCTION

Starting at 17th level, you gain the ability to command creatures you have seduced. While creatures are instilled with lust by your Lustful Gaze feature, you can take a bonus action on your turn to verbally command what each of those creatures will do on its next turn.

SORCEROUS ORIGIN: SEROPHAGE

You have always been preoccupied with blood, both your own and that of others. At some point, you learned that you could exercise some control over your blood, and you've harnessed that power to awaken the magic that flows through your veins. The dark possibilities of this new magic revealed themselves when you discovered that you could control the blood flowing in the veins of other creatures too.

STRENGTH BENEATH THE SKIN

At 1st level, you gain control over your own blood flow. When you take bludgeoning damage, roll a d4 and subtract the result from the damage taken. At 6th level, the die increases to a d6.

BLOOD FUEL

At 6th level, instead of moving, you can inflict 1d4 slashing damage on yourself and regain a number of sorcery points equal to the slashing damage. Alternatively, you can choose to increase the save DC or the spell attack bonus of the next spell you cast by +1 instead of regaining sorcery points. At 12th level, the die becomes a d8 and the increase to your spell attack bonus or save DC increases to +2.

BLOOD BARRIER

At 14th level, you can draw blood from a recently killed (within the last 30 minutes) creature of Intelligence 5 or higher and form it into swirling rings that surround you. The number of rings equals your Charisma modifier.

The rings absorb physical damage. When you are struck by a melee or ranged weapon attack, one ring absorbs 1d10 damage from the attack, and then disappears in a splash.

As an action, you can cause one ring to form into a magical spear of blood and launch itself at a target you select within 60 feet. Make a ranged spell attack. On a successful hit, the target takes (1d6 + your Charisma modifier) piercing damage and must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of your next turn. The spear is considered a magical weapon. It evaporates after it's expended. The rings remain until they absorb an attack or they are expended as weapons.

EXSANGUINATE

At 18th level, you can siphon a steady stream of blood from a living creature at a distance. As an action, you designate a creature within 40 feet; that creature must make a Constitution saving throw. If the saving throw fails, the creature takes 2d6 necrotic damage as blood oozes through its skin and flows through the air to you, where it's absorbed through your skin. For every 2 points of damage done to the target, you regain either 1 hit point or 1 sorcery point. The exsanguination continues, causing damage and restoring your hit points or sorcery points at the start of your turn, until you end it (no action required by you) or the target makes a successful Constitution saving throw at the end of its turn.

WIZARD TRADITION: SCHOOL OF BLOOD MAGIC

A blood mage powers his magic with the secrets he learns from his own blood. Eventually, he learns to manipulate others' blood too. A blood mage has the following class features.

BLOOD SAVANT

Beginning when you take up the study of blood magic at 2nd level, the gold and time you must spend to copy a blood magic spell into your spellbook is halved. You also gain proficiency in the Medicine skill.

Starting at 2nd level when you choose to focus your studies on blood magic, you gain a greater awareness of the blood flowing through your veins, the heart that pumps it, and some measure of control over both. When you are subjected to a disease or poison effect that allows you to make a Constitution saving throw to take only half damage, you instead take no damage if you succeed on the saving throw, and only half damage if you fail.

BLOOD VISION

At 6th level, you gain the ability to see a moment of the past through the eyes of a creature whose blood you consume. When you ingest the blood of another creature, you are stunned for 1 round. During that time, you experience a memory of the creature through its own eyes which may or may not be of the incident that caused it to bleed. The older the blood, the foggier and more obscure the memory is likely to be.

Once you have consumed a creature's blood in this way, the same creature's blood will never again produce a memory for you.

ABSORB IMPURITIES

Starting at 10th level, you can absorb poisons or diseases from another creature, living or dead, and turn it to your use. By exposing a fresh cut to a source of disease or poison, you can safely absorb it, storing it in your bloodstream, dormant. You can then inflict it on another by spitting a stream of blood at them. As an action, make a ranged spell attack. On a successful hit the target is exposed to the disease or poison and must proceed with whatever saving throws are required.

In three days, if you do not pass the disease or poison along to another living creature, it becomes active in your bloodstream. You make the first two saving throws required by the disease or poison with disadvantage.

MIRE OR QUICKEN BLOOD

At 14th level, a blood mage can turn other creatures' blood into sludge or he can thin it once per day. As an action, he can cause a creature that fails a Constitution saving throw to become slowed. Alternately, he can cause a creature that fails a Constitution saving throw to gain the effects of haste. The target can intentionally fail the saving throw. The duration of either effect is a number of rounds equal to your Intelligence modifier.

ARCANE TRADITION: SCHOOL OF VOID MAGIC

Void magic comprises a dangerous school of wizardry that exists alongside, but in the shadows of, the more well-known practices. This magic is anathema to existence itself, making it difficult to master and dangerous even to study. Dabblers rarely produce effects more profound than minor injury, property damage, and psychological scars to themselves and those around them. More serious investigations into void magic can spell disaster. Only alien creatures whose psychology and physiology defy human understanding seem capable of commanding void magic with relative ease; even beings as anomalous as aboleths respect and fear the power of void magic.

Void magic spells can never be added to a wizard's spellbook as part of the two spells learned automatically for gaining a level (with the exception of void savants; see below). To learn a void magic spell, a wizard must find an NPC void speaker who's willing to impart the knowledge or discover the spell written as a spell scroll, in a captured spellbook, carved on a temple wall, or some other form of recorded lore. Alternatively, if the GM allows it, a character who sees and hears a void magic spell being cast can add it to his or her spell book, using the same rules as transcribing a spell from a scroll.

Despite void magic's strange origins, it still functions similarly to other arcane magic on a fundamental level. Void magic follows all the normal rules for spellcasting and is susceptible to dispelling, countermagic, and antimagic as normal. Void magic spells always have a verbal component and can't, under any circumstance, be cast without it.

VOID SPEAKER

Given the nature of void magic, it comes as no surprise that a tradition of wizards sprang up from the study of Void Speech. Void speakers are a standoffish and secretive lot, prone to delving into crumbling, monster-prowled ruins and the dark corners of moldering libraries with equal caution; carelessly reading a text that may be sprinkled with void glyphs can be just as deadly as stumbling into a den of trolls. As you focus your study on Void Speech, you learn to properly invoke the words and glyphs to empower your magic and to tap the vast potential of the void.

Some void speakers risk the darkness for the sake of knowledge or defense against that which lies beyond.

Others succumb to the madness and corruption magic touches and become living conduits for th seeking entry into the mortal world.

VOID SAVANT

Beginning when you select this tradition at 2nd l gold and time you must spend to copy a void spel your spellbook is halved.

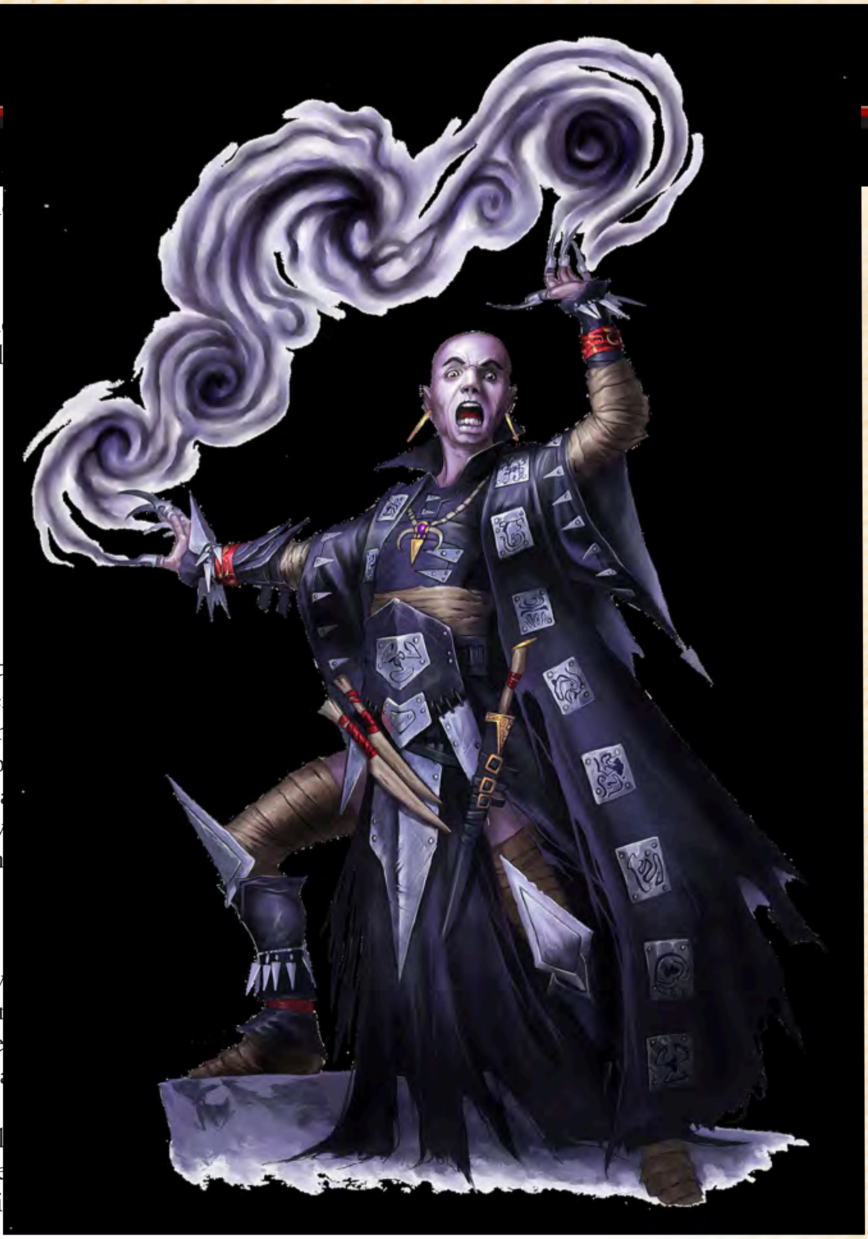
When you gain a level, one of the two spells you learn for gaining a level can be a void magic spell, even if you've never encountered the spell before. Similarly, when you learn a new cantrip, it can be a void magic cantrip, even if you've never previously encountered it.

WHISPERS OF THE VOID

Starting at 2nd level, as a bonus action immediat you cast a spell of 1st level or higher, you can utte words of Void Speech and weave its dark magic in spell. The tainted spell disorients one creature yo see that the spell affects when you cast it. The cre has disadvantage on the next attack roll or ability makes before the start of your next turn. You can feature if you are unable to speak.

REBUKE FROM BEYOND

Beginning at 6th level, when you are damaged by creature within 60 feet, you can use your reactio bark a destructive word of Void Speech. If the cre can hear you, it takes necrotic damage equal to h wizard level plus your Intelligence modifier. You this ability a number of times equal to your Intell modifier (minimum of 1), and you regain all expe when you finish a long rest. You can't use this abi are unable to speak.



POWERFUL ECHO

Starting at 10th level, when you cast a void magic spell that targets only one creature, you can have it target a second creature. Additionally, you have advantage on Constitution saving throws made to maintain concentration on void spells.

MANIFESTATION

At 14th level, you can use your action to pronounce a complicated phrase in Void Speech. Choose a point you can see within 60 feet. The area within 20 feet of that point is shrouded in dim light for one minute. Any creature hostile to you within the area is vulnerable to necrotic damage and has disadvantage on Wisdom checks. An affected creature that starts its turn in the area or that enters the area for the first time on its turn takes 3d6 necrotic damage, or half damage with a successful Constitution saving throw (using your spell save DC). Once you use this ability, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest. You can't use this feature if you're unable to speak.

NONMAGICAL ITEMS

Some gear is unique to particular groups or regions, and not always available for sale. Some of this equipment is as likely to be found as treasure as it is to be sold in a shop.

CENTAUR LANCE

Availability: Rare spear, 100 gp

The massive spears used by some of the centaur tribes of the Plain are made from heavy wood and iron bands. Nearing 12 feet in length, creatures of Medium size and smaller may not effectively throw these weapons. The spears do twice the normal damage, require two hands, and provide advantage on attacks made against mounted opponents. Clever Winter Folk have devised combat maneuvers that involve two halflings set to one spear.

KARIV WHEEL SHIELD

Availability: Rare shield, 100 gp

The wagons of the Wandering Realm are made to withstand attack. The Plain is filled with bandits and raiders, and the Lovari clan have devised numerous ways to repel enemies. The wagons of the wanderers are sturdily made, but the wheels offer a potential weak spot. The clever smiths and tinkerers have created removable shields that can be used to protect both wagon and warrior.

When four shields are affixed to a wagon, they increase the vehicle's durability (AC 15, 45 hp) and provide it with a damage threshold of 10. The wagon may only move one third its normal rate while the shields are in place.

You can remove a shield as an action and use it in combat, gaining an additional +1 to AC on top of the shield's normal bonus. Because it is heavy and awkward, you have disadvantage on Dexterity checks while wielding the shield if your Strength is less than 16.

KHAZZAKI TRICK-BOW

Availability: Uncommon shortbow, 50 gp

Made from the light yet strong wood of the pruzny tree, this decorated shortbow is used in archery competitions and hunting small game. The heavier upper limb of the bow is often carved to depict the archer's family symbol or an icon that is meaningful to the archer. The range on these weapons is half that of a normal shortbow as they are not designed for the rigors of combat. They provide advantage on Charisma (Performance) checks when used by skilled archers. Legends tell of a lost bow carved to depict Grandmother Yaga; the bow is said to be haunted by the crone's magic—firing snakes instead of arrows.

ROTHENIAN SPICE KIT

Availability: Uncommon cook's utensils, 10 gp

This cook's accessory consists of a large belt pouch with many small compartments sewn into its interior. Each compartment contains a spice from the Rothenian Plain (Kariv thyme, Khazzaki pepper, Winter Folk ginger root, centaur mustard, etc.) Creatures who are proficient with cook's utensils may use these spices to create delicious meals from ingredients that might otherwise be bland. These cooks may make a DC 5 Intelligence check during a long rest to use the spices in their cooking. Creatures who eat the resulting meal may regain one additional hit die up to their normal maximum. A failed check results in an edible but overly spiced meal.

WHIP-SASH

Availability: Rare whip, 16 gp

The stylish and colorful silk sashes worn by various peoples on the Plain are normally used to safely secure items to their wearer's waist. A cunning silkman designed a sash that could be used as a whip when other weapons are unavailable. Stories tell of a family of Kariv who, having been disarmed and taken prisoner by bandits from the Black City, lashed their captors to death with silken sashes. You can draw the whip as a bonus action by tugging on the sash's knot to reveal a hidden handle. The whip-sash functions as a normal whip.

DRUGS AND POISONS

Midgard contains hideous poisons and a magical drug that enables users to pierce the veil into the afterlife.

GHOUL SALIVA PASTE (INJURY)

Price per Dose: 100 gp

This is a pungent and unsavory mash of meat and tissue, pre-chewed by ghouls and soaked in their saliva. Unscrupulous individuals and some ghoul hunters apply it to weapons to incapacitate their targets for a few moments. A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Using this poison gives you disadvantage on Stealth checks against creatures that have the Keen Smell trait.

Requiem

Requiem is a potent drug that allows its users to speak with the dead when smoked. Made from death's head mushrooms, the cremated ashes of sentient beings, and various other unsavory components, it gives its users visions of the dead but is highly addictive. It comes in two forms: a muddy substance called clay and a refined powder called bliss.

REQUIEM CLAY (INHALED)

Price per Dose: 750 gp

When you smoke requiem clay, you summon the spirit of a single deceased person that you personally knew in life. The spirit's image is visible and its voice can be heard in whispers, but it cannot touch you. You can ask the spirit up to five questions, as the *speak with dead* spell. The spirit knows only what it knew in life, including the languages it knew. Answers are usually brief, cryptic, or repetitive, and the spirit is under no compulsion to offer a truthful answer if you are hostile to it or it recognizes you as an enemy. The spirit can't learn new information, doesn't comprehend anything that has happened since it died, and can't speculate about future events.

Afterward, you suffer 1d6 poison damage per question asked and must succeed on a Constitution saving throw (DC 10 +1 per question asked) or become addicted to the drug. If you become addicted, you suffer one level of exhaustion 1d4 days after you last smoked the drug and gain a further level of exhaustion for each week that requiem is not smoked. Levels of exhaustion gained through requiem use do not reduce as normal after taking a long rest. Smoking requiem again eliminates levels of exhaustion gained from abstaining.

At the end of each week, you can make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. Two consecutive weekly successful saving throws are necessary to break the addiction through abstinence. Alternatively, the addiction can be broken with a *lesser restoration* or *heal* spell.

REQUIEM BLISS (INHALED)

Price per Dose: 2,500 gp

When you smoke requiem bliss, you experience feelings of euphoria. You summon the spirit of a single deceased person whose name you know. The spirit takes on the physical characteristics it had in life and might touch you, though it cannot harm you. You can ask the spirit questions as the spell speak with dead with the following exceptions: you can ask up to ten questions, and the spirit cannot lie to you. In addition, you are simultaneously granted the benefit of the *contact other plane* spell (without taking psychic damage or going insane), as the summoned spirit consults with others and relates information about a single question that would otherwise be unknown to it.

You suffer 1d6 poison damage per question asked, and must succeed on a Constitution saving throw (DC 12 +1 per question asked) or become addicted to the drug.

If you become addicted, you suffer two levels of exhaustion 1d4 days after you last smoked the drug and gain a further level of exhaustion for each week that requiem is not smoked. Levels of exhaustion gained through requiem use do not reduce as normal after taking a long rest. Smoking requiem again eliminates levels of exhaustion gained from abstaining.

At the end of each week, you can make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. Three consecutive weekly successful saving throws are necessary to break the addiction through abstinence. Alternatively, the addiction can be broken with a *lesser restoration* or *heal spell*.

MAGICAL ITEMS

The items listed here are all unusual enough to be hidden from players' eyes. In some cases, they are best used to enhance NPCs rather than purely as treasure.

ANKH OF ATEN

Wondrous item, rare

This golden ankh is about 12 inches long and has 5 charges. While holding the ankh by the loop, you can expend 1 charge as an action to fire a beam of brilliant sunlight in a 5-foot-wide, 60-foot-line from the end. Each creature caught in the line must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 5d8 radiant damage and is blinded until the end of your next turn. On a successful save, it takes half damage and isn't blinded. Undead have disadvantage on this saving throw. The ankh regains 1d6 expended charges daily at dawn.

BLACK PHIAL

Wondrous item, uncommon

This black stone phial has a tightly fitting stopper and 3 charges. As an action, you can fill the phial with blood taken from a living, or recently deceased (dead no longer than 1 minute), humanoid and expend 1 charge. When you do so, the *black phial* transforms the blood into a *potion of greater healing*. A creature who drinks this potion must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour.

The phial regains 1d3 expended charges daily at midnight. If you expend the phial's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the phial crumbles into dust and is destroyed.

BLOOD MARK

Wondrous item, uncommon

This coin, more commonly called the drop, resembles a gold ring with a single hole in the center. It holds 1 charge, visible as a red glow in the center of the coin. As an action, you can expend 1 charge and regain 1d3 hit points. At the same time, the humanoid who pledged their blood to the coin takes necrotic damage and reduces their hit point maximum by an equal amount. This damage lasts until the creature finishes a long rest. It dies if this damage reduces its hit point maximum to 0. You may expend the charges in up to 5 *blood marks* as part of the same action.

To replenish an expended charge in a blood mark, a humanoid must pledge a pint of their blood in a 10 minute ritual that involves letting a drop of their blood fall through the center of the coin. The drop disappears in the process and the center fills with a red glow. There is no limit to how much blood a humanoid may pledge, but each coin can only hold 1 charge. To pledge more, the humanoid must perform the ritual on another *blood mark*.

Any person foolish enough to pledge more than a single blood coin might find them all redeemed at once, since such redemptions often happen at great blood feasts. Living creatures that lose too much blood grow weak and die, and desperate peasants discover this to their sorrow at the great feasts each year.

CORPSE'S PEACE

Ring, uncommon

This delicate marble ring was created by the Ironcrag dwarves who battle the ghouls and vampires of the duchies in the Grisal Marches. When you slip the band onto the finger of a corpse, it protects the body from decay, and the corpse cannot become undead as long as the ring remains on its finger. Days the corpse spends wearing the ring don't count as days spent dead, effectively extending the time limit on spells such as *raise dead*.

EYE OF HORUS

Wondrous item, uncommon

The *Eye of Horus* helps you determine reality from phantasms and trickery. While wearing this magical gold and lapis lazuli amulet, you have advantage on saving throws against fear and illusion spells and effects.

GRANNY WAX

Wondrous item, uncommon

Normally found in a small glass jar containing 1d3 applications, this foul-smelling, greasy yellow substance is made by hags living in the forests of the Blood Kingdom in accordance with an age-old secret recipe. When you rub the wax onto an ordinary broom or wooden stick, it transforms the object into a *broom of flying* for one hour.

JAMBIYA OF THE EBON NIGHT

Weapon (dagger), uncommon

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

This rune-covered curved magical dagger is the result of demonic tutelage over Sar-Shaban royals. When you hit a creature with this weapon, it must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become cursed for 1 minute. While cursed, whenever the creature makes an attack roll or saving throw, it must roll 1d4 and subtract the number rolled from the attack roll or saving throw.

KEFFIYEH OF SERENDIPITOUS ESCAPE

Wondrous item, very rare

This checkered cotton headdress is indistinguishable from the mundane scarves worn by the desert nomads. As an action, you can remove the headdress, spread it open on the ground, and speak the command word. The keffiyeh transforms into a 3 ft. x 5 ft. *carpet of flying* which moves according to your spoken directions provided that you are within 30 feet of it. Speaking the command word a second time transforms the carpet back into a headdress again.

KEY OF VELES

Wondrous Item, requires attunement

A *key of Veles* is a corroded, copper-and-mithral key about 1 foot long. When held near a ley line or shadow road, it automatically points toward that line or road and permits the holder to access the ley line's effects as a spellcaster. If the holder speaks the command word, it opens that's line's shadow road. Each such use expends one of its 10 charges.

After a *key of Veles* is used 10 times, it cracks and becomes useless. The device also opens doors, chests, gates, bars, shackles, chains, and bolts, and it automatically dispels an *arcane lock* cast by a wizard of lower than 15th level. This expends no charges.

KYSHAARTH'S FANG

Weapon (dagger), rare (requires attunement)

This dagger's blade is composed of black, bone-like material. Tales suggest the weapon is fashioned from a voidling's (see *Tome of Beasts*) tendril barb. When you hit with an attack using this magic dagger, the target takes an extra 2d6 necrotic damage. If you are in dim light or darkness, you regain a number of hit points equal to the amount of necrotic damage dealt.

MEMORY PHILTER

Wondrous item, rare

This swirling liquid is the collected memory of a mortal who willingly traded that memory away to the shadow fey. When you touch the philter, you feel a flash of the emotion contained within. You can unstopper and pour out the philter as an action, unless otherwise specified. The philter's effects take place immediately, either on you or on a creature you can see within 30 feet (your choice). If the target is unwilling, it can make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw to resist the effect of the philter. A creature affected by a philter experiences the memory contained in the vial.

A *memory philter* can only be used once, but the vial can be reused to store a new memory. Storing a new memory requires a few herbs, a 10 minute ritual and the sacrifice of a memory. The required sacrifice is detailed in each memory entry below.

Bonds of Friendship. As a reaction when a creature you can see within 30 feet targets you with an attack or a spell, you can pour out the philter. The creature must choose a new target or the attack or spell is wasted. A creature that can't be charmed is immune to this effect. To create this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice a happy memory of a time with a friend.

Coward's Shame. The target becomes frightened. While frightened in this way it flees from you by the most direct route it can, and it can only take actions that facilitate its escape. If the creature ends its turn more than 30 feet away from you and can't see you, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. To create this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice a memory of a failure or embarrassment.

Youthful Joy. The target regains 3d8 + 6 hit points and removes 1 level of exhaustion. To create this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice a favored childhood memory.

Raging Lust. The target is charmed by you, until you or one of your allies does something to harm the target. If you are the sort of creature the target normally finds attractive, it treats you as the object of its desire while charmed. You can make one *suggestion* (as the spell) of the target. The target can repeat the saving throw when it finishes a long rest. On a failed save, it remains charmed and you can make another *suggestion*. On a success, the effect ends. To create this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice all memory of a romantic partner.

MOONLIT WARD

Wondrous item, very rare

This 10-foot tall standing stone is inlaid with silver runes and symbols of Midgard's moons, and weighs 7,500 pounds. When activated, the *moonlit ward* creates a 200-foot sphere of area safe from the Shadow Realm's corruption. This area is considered not to be part of the Shadow Realm for purposes of gaining or recovering from shadow corruption.

Activating the ward requires a special ritual that takes 8 hours to complete, performed on the night of a full moon, and it remains active until the next full moon. The ritual is detailed in the runes and carvings on the stone, and can be deciphered with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check.

If three or more *moonlit wards* are arranged to surround an area and activated, they purge shadow corruption from the area between them.

MOONSTEEL WEAPON

Weapon (rapier or dagger), rare

The blade of this magic weapon seems to shine from within with a pale white light. The weapon deals an extra 1d6 radiant damage to any creature it hits. If the creature is a shapechanger or any other creature not in its true form, it becomes frightened until the start of your next turn. At the start of its turn, a creature frightened in this way must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or immediately return to its true form. For the purpose of this weapon, "shapechanger" refers to any creature with the Shapechanger trait.

NULLIFIER'S LEXICON

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

This book has black leather pages with silver bindings and a silver front plate. Void Speech glyphs adorn the front plate, which is pitted and tarnished. The pages are thin sheets of corrupted brass and are inscribed with more blasphemous glyphs. While you are attuned to the lexicon, you can speak, read, and write Void Speech, and you know the *crushing curse** cantrip.

By intoning certain passages from this book, you can cast the following spells: *conjure voidborn**, *dominate monster*, *life drain**, *shatter*, and *thunderwave*.

You can cast a spell once from the *nullifier's lexicon* without difficulty. For each successive casting, you take a cumulative 1d6 necrotic damage. This resets when you finish a long rest.

Finally, you can spend 1 minute pronouncing a complicated passage in Void Speech to rearrange reality to your will. State your general intention when you make the pronouncement ("strike down my enemies," "repair the damage the dragon did to me," etc.). The DM decides the form this alteration of reality takes, but the effect of any wizard, cleric, or Void magic spell is appropriate. When the effect occurs, you suffer 5d10 necrotic damage, and you can't use this ability again for 7 days.

**indicates a spell contained in this book*

POCKET OASIS

Wondrous item, very rare

When you throw this 5-foot by 5-foot square of black cloth into the air as an action, it creates a portal to an oasis hidden within an extra-dimensional space. A pool of shallow, fresh water fills the center of the oasis, and bountiful fruit and nut trees grow around the pool. The fruits and nuts from the trees provide enough nourishment for up to 10 Medium creatures. The air in the oasis is pure, cool, and even a little crisp, and the environment is free from harmful effects. When creatures enter the extra-dimensional space, they are protected from effects and creatures outside the oasis as if they were in the space created by a *rope trick* spell. The effect lasts for 24 hours or until all the creatures leave the extra-dimensional oasis, whichever occurs first. Any creatures still inside the oasis at the end of 24 hours are harmlessly ejected. Once used, the pocket oasis cannot be used again for 24 hours.

RIFT ORB

Wondrous item, rare

This orb is a sphere of obsidian 3 inches in diameter. When you speak the command word in Void Speech, you can throw the sphere as an action to a point within 60 feet. When the sphere reaches the point you choose or if it strikes a solid object on the way, it immediately stops and generates a tiny rift into the Void. The area within 20 feet of the rift orb becomes difficult terrain, and gravity begins drawing everything in the affected area toward the rift. Each creature in the area at the start of its turn, or when it enters the area for the first time on a turn, must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pulled 10 feet toward the rift. A creature that touches the rift takes 4d10 necrotic damage. Unattended objects in the area are pulled 10 feet toward the rift at the start of your turn. Nonmagical objects pulled into the rift are destroyed.

The *rift orb* functions for 1 minute, after which time it becomes inert. It can't be used again until the following midnight.

SCIMITAR OF THE DESERT WINDS

Weapon (scimitar), rare (requires attunement)

Created by the Wind Lords, these shining steel scimitars are sometimes wielded by Tamasheq chieftains and imajaghans. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. When you hit a creature with the scimitar, you can call upon the power of the Wind Lords to push it away from you unless it succeeds on a DC 15 Strength saving throw. If the creature fails, it is pushed 15 feet away from you in a direction of your choice and knocked prone. While attuned to this scimitar, you are not affected by the extreme heat of the desert during the day or by the extreme cold at night.

SLIPPERS OF THE CAT

Wondrous item, uncommon

While you wear these fine, black cloth slippers, you gain advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks to keep your balance. When you fall while wearing these slippers, you land on your feet and can make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage.

STAFF OF THE FIRST LABYRINTH

Staff, very rare (requires attunement)

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Created in the days of the Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar, these staffs are highly prized by minotaur librarians and scholars. When you hit a creature with the staff, you can choose to banish it to an extra-dimensional labyrinth unless it succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. The creature remains trapped in the labyrinth for the duration (concentration, up to 1 minute) or until it escapes the maze. The target can make a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check as an action to attempt to escape the labyrinth. If it succeeds, it escapes and the spell ends (a minotaur automatically succeeds). When the effect ends, the creature reappears in the space it left or, if that space is occupied, in the nearest unoccupied space. When you use this property of the staff, it can't be used again until the next sunrise.

TAERGASH'S EXSANGUINATING TOME

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement by a wizard)

This tome is wrapped in a filthy cover that weeps warm, wet droplets of blood. Although gore flows over the book's pages when opened, the unnerving leakage never obscures the spells' details to those who wish to read them.

Taergash's exsanguinating tome contains the following spells.

Cantrip: *blood tide**

1st Level: *bane, false life, hideous laughter, ray of sickness, stanch, weapon of blood**

2nd Level: *blood armor*, blood lure*, bloodshot*, caustic blood**

3rd Level: *animate dead, fear, ray of exhaustion, vampiric touch, vital mark**

4th Level: *blood and steel, phantasmal killer*

5th Level: *cruor of visions*, exsanguinating cloud*, sanguine horror**

*indicates a spell contained in this book

VIAL OF SUNLIGHT

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This crystal vial is filled with water from a spring high in the Cloudwall Mountains and has been blessed by priestesses of Lada. You can use an action to cause the vial to emit bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet for 1 minute. This light is pure sunlight, causing harm or discomfort to vampires and other undead creatures that are sensitive to it. Once used, the vial can't be activated again until the next dawn.

VOIDSKIN CLOAK

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This pitch-black cloak absorbs light and whispers as it moves. It feels like thin leather with a knobby, scaly texture, though none of that detail is visible to the eye. While you wear this cloak, you have resistance to necrotic damage. While the hood is up, your face is pooled in shadow, and you can use a bonus action to fix your black gaze upon a creature you can see within 60 feet. If the creature can see you, it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success. Once a creature succeeds on its saving throw, it can't be affected by the cloak again for 24 hours. Pulling the hood up or down requires an action.

VOIDWALKER

Ring, legendary (requires attunement)

This band of tarnished silver bears no ornament or inscription, but is icy cold to the touch. The patches of dark corrosion on the ring constantly, but subtly, move and change; though, this never occurs while anyone observes the ring.

While wearing *Voidwalker*, you gain the benefits of a ring of free action and a ring of cold resistance. It has the following additional properties.

Forbidden Lore. *Voidwalker* knows a great deal about esoteric and dark topics, and grants you the following skill modifiers: Arcana +8, History +8, Religion +8.

Necrotic Absorption. When you would take necrotic damage, you can use your reaction to absorb the damage instead. You regain hit points equal to the necrotic damage you would have otherwise taken.

Void Step. You can use the ring to cast *misty step* at will. Instead of a puff of mist, you fade and reappear in a black smear in the air.

Sentience. *Voidwalker* is a sentient neutral evil ring with an Intelligence of 14, a Wisdom of 12, and a Charisma of 16. It has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 120 feet.

The ring communicates telepathically with its wearer and can also speak Abyssal, Common, Infernal, and Void Speech. It constantly whispers suggestions for its wearer to find new pathways to the Void, often as a means to solve any problem or dilemma the wearer faces.

Personality. *Voidwalker* is an obsequious thing that takes great pains to cater to the desires of its wearer. It comports itself as an advisor, majordomo, or other high-ranking servant. In truth, its purpose is to return to the Void and to take a mortal "master" with it. Conflict arises if its wearer tries to seal a breach or gateway into the Void or to discard the ring.

The ring is clever and knows that most mortals want nothing to do with the Void directly. It also knows that most of the creatures with strength enough to claim it will end up in dire straits sooner or later. It doesn't overplay its hand trying to push a master to take a plunge into the depths of the Void, but instead makes itself as indispensable as possible. It provides counsel and protection, all the while subtly pushing its master to take greater and greater risks.

Once it's maneuvered its wearer into a position of desperation, generally on the brink of death, *Voidwalker* offers a way out. If the master accepts, it opens a gate into the Void, most likely sealing the creature's doom.

ARTIFACTS

The strongest items of Midgard are its ancient—sometimes pre-human—magic, holy relics, and artifacts of unknown pedigree. Use these with caution.

AN'DUCYR, TREASURE OF THE KHAN

Wondrous item (longbow), artifact (requires attunement)

At the foot of the world tree, among the roots that rose high as hills, the centaurs of the Dargit clan knelt before the young Khan. "We will know our enemy by the sight of your arrows," the centaur bowyer said, "call us Kin Ludi, allies of the Khazzaki." The centaur then presented Bodhan with his masterpiece. The Khan took the bow, drew back the string, and fired a gleaming arrow toward the stars. "All of Midgard will tremble before our hooves, Centaur and Khazzaki!" he cried. With that, a roar arose such that the leaves of the world tree shook high above.

Made from the boughs of the world tree in Domovogrod by the legendary centaur bowyer, Hazunn the Bender, the bow of unity is one of the treasures of the Khazzaki people. The bow is the property of the current Khan, Bodhan Zenody, and serves as both dreadful weapon and symbol of his power. The world tree in Domovogrod has roots into the Elflands, and the bow has traces of elven magic in its grain; but the tree also grows into the Shadow Realm, and drawing back the string of *An'ducyr* is an invitation to the cunning shadow fey who want the bow for themselves.

Magic Weapon. *An'ducyr* is a magic weapon that grants a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. It does not require ammunition, instead generating gleaming arrows when its string is drawn back. These arrows do radiant damage.

Eyes into the Elflands. As a bonus action, you may draw back the string of *An'ducyr*, conjuring a gleaming arrow of radiant energy. Until the end of your turn, you gain truesight (600 feet). If the bow is not fired at a creature before the end of your turn, you take 2d6 radiant damage.

Blinding Arrows. Once each day, as a bonus action, you may call upon the magic of the Elflands to steal your enemy's sight. For one minute, any creature damaged by *An'ducyr* must succeed a DC 16 Wisdom save or be blinded until the end of your next turn.

Unifier. While attuned to *An'ducyr*, you have advantage on all Charisma checks. Additionally, you gain proficiency in Intimidation, Persuasion, and Performance.

Known in the Shadow Courts. While attuned to *An'ducyr*, you are stalked by the shadow fey. They wish to steal the bow and corrupt it. At inopportune times, you are attacked or manipulated by agents of the shadow courts. While in Khan Zenody's possession, *An'ducyr* is safe from the shadow fey, who wait for it to pass into weaker hands.

Destroying the Bow. To destroy *An'ducyr*, the wielder must be of Khazzaki descent, use the bow to slay Sleipnir with an arrow of horse slaying, and then bathe the bow in the magical horse's blood.

SPARK OF KJORD

Wondrous item, artifact

Thirty years ago, a priest of Mavros named Kjord dared to stand up to the vampires who raided his village. He became blessed with divine power and for a time was able to save a number of Morgau's villages from the predations of vampire raiders. Eventually, he was slain by then-Prince Lucan and his village was obliterated, but, in his last act of defiance, Kjord set his divine spark free. From time to time, this formless spark spontaneously passes to those who defy vampiric rule, and it stays with them as long as they do not waver in their opposition to the Elders.

Possessing the spark is something of a two-edged sword. The servants of the vampires are everywhere, and it will not be long before word reaches King Lucan that the white fire has reappeared.

If the spark is passed to you, you gain the following benefits.

Stalwart Leader. You gain advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks to rally people to your cause. In addition, you and friendly creatures within 10 feet of you can't be charmed by a vampire

Blessed Champion. All damage you deal with melee weapons to undead creatures is radiant. In addition, once per day when standing in defiance of authority and to advance a higher purpose, a white light burns in your eyes. You gain 10 temporary hit points that last for 1 hour, and you gain the benefits of a bless spell for the same duration (no concentration required).

Restless Spirit. The effects of the *Spark of Kjord* depart immediately upon your death. Alternatively, it will jump to another individual if you waver in your sworn convictions. To date, none have held the *Spark of Kjord* for more than 11 days, since even the most sincere have moments of doubt. If you are granted the spark, you must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw of increasing difficulty each day, starting on the second day of carrying the spark (DC 10 +1 difficulty each day thereafter) to perfectly maintain your convictions. You can make the saving throw with advantage if you have actively demonstrated your convictions in the previous 24 hours, such as by fighting against a vampire or its servants.

Destroying the Spark. To destroy the *Spark of Kjord*, an evil wizard must wish for the spark to be bound to the corporeal form of its current host, then that host must be slain by King Lucan's bite. The spark forever disappears the moment the host reawakens as a vampire spawn under King Lucan's control.

Alternatively, if the creature blessed by the *Spark of Kjord* slays King Lucan, the spark disperses in a flash of brilliant light, originating from the creature's eyes, as the last remnants of Kjord's spirit finally find peace.

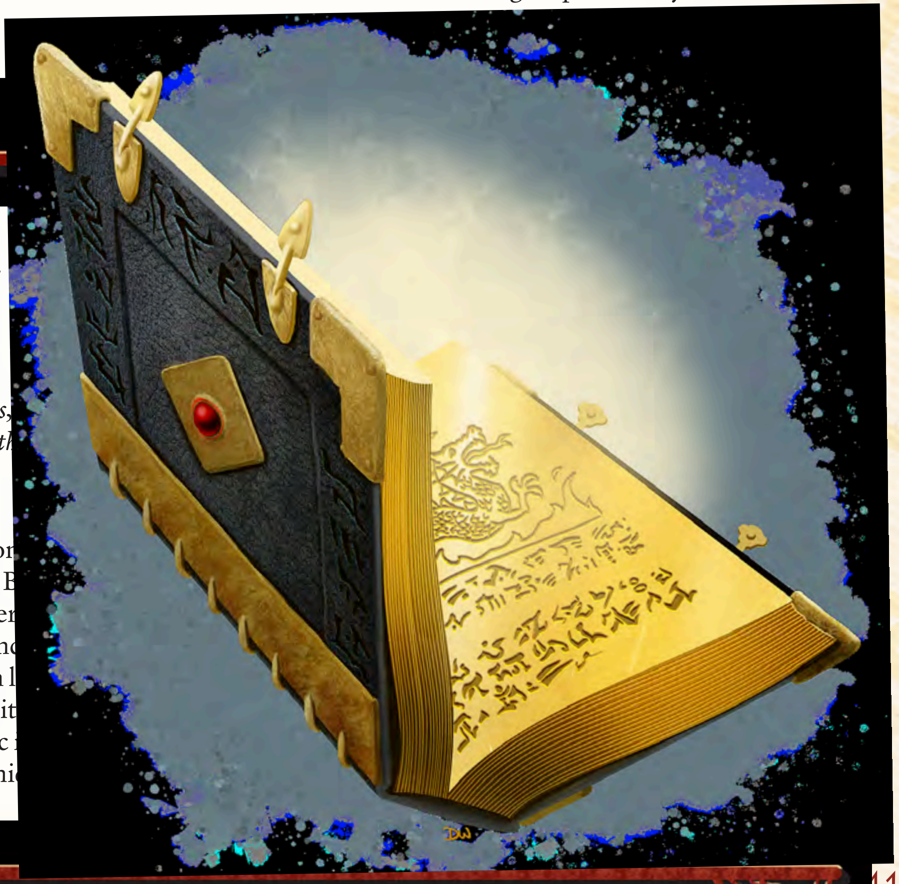
ALTERNATE MAGIC

While magic intertwines and binds all that is Midgard, the source that one taps to shape spells can differ greatly. Likewise, each source influences the resultant school of magic and extracts a unique cost from its wielder.

BLOOD MAGIC

Among the most heinous magic known is the arcana of Taergash the Bloodpurger, a wizard whose unhealthy obsession with the power of blood is legendary. Taergash believed that by mastering the power in his own blood, he could achieve unlimited power; his dream, however, suffered frequent setbacks as he failed in ever more vigorous ways. Eventually, a simple cut from a broken alembic—the result of a moment's clumsiness during an arcane experiment—caused him to bleed to death. Nevertheless, Taergash's spells are still sought by evil necromancers, sorcerers, and other bloodthirsty casters, and they can be found in blood-drenched grimoires and bile-dripping tomes. Some wizards are so steeped in the study of this gruesome magic that they become known as blood mages.

Antipaladins, blood mages, and wielders of blood magic in general are intended to appear only as nonplayer characters. That's not because antipaladin or blood mage player characters are unbalanced or no fun. They can be great fun for the person who's playing them, but either of these characters in a group of mostly Good or



Black Spire Codex

Bound in thick, black leather—worn and cracked with age—this book's embossed cover displays unusual sigils that defy translation, and that are, perhaps, of Ankeshelian origin. The Codex's pages are sheets of gold hammered paper thin, with spells, diagrams, and illustrations carefully pressed into th metal and magically preserved.

Centuries of spells lay undiscovered in the crypts, libraries, and personal scroll collectio Allain's wizards. One famous example is the B Spire Codex, so named because of its discove that hallowed institution many years ago. Sin the book has been loaned to other Bemmean l and even stolen by the adventurous and ambit great value lies in the wealth of ancient magic Many of the spells found in this chapter are hi its golden pages.

Neutral creatures can be a real problem for everyone else. Evil characters in general, and antipaladins and blood mages in particular, are more than the sum of a few distasteful class abilities. Both represent an approach to life and society that's utterly amoral, self-centered, and uncompromising—a bad combination where party harmony is concerned.

Before even thinking about making up a character that uses blood spells and abilities, you must clear it not only with your GM but also with the other players. Make sure everyone understands what they're allowing into the group and that they're willing to put up with the consequences.

Even then, we don't recommend it. These abilities are best reserved for evil NPCs and villains.

Seriously—don't say we didn't warn you.

For ease of reference, we have labeled all blood spells in this book to indicate they are such. See blood magic spells starting on page 419.

RED PORTAL MAGIC

The Honorable Society of Portal Wizards based in Per-Anu is dedicated to the study and use of the Red Portals to travel to planes and worlds beyond the Southlands. The society has developed a number of unique spells known only to its members. Rarely, scrolls bearing these spells can be found for sale in the markets of Bemmea, Mhalmet, or Kel Azjer. Red Portal spells can be found starting on page 419.

The Red Portals are the shadow portals of the Southlands, far more powerful than the Ramagi portals. They connect to shadow roads but also to other planes, dimensions, and at times whole other side campaigns and mysterious places that you can hint at without having to build out an entire world. The idea is, of course, to suggest whole realms of bizarre, wondrous, magical, or horrifying alternate realities. The magic of these portals is likewise meant to be otherworldly and a bit odd, sometimes drawing on a caster's greatest skill and effort. Most Red Portal magic has roots firmly in the ancient tradition of Nurian mages, and the Nurian Red Portal Society is said to hunt down and exterminate those who steal their secrets.

SHADOW MAGIC

Shadow magic is found in the *Midgard Heroes Handbook*. Here we note the effects of corruption due to travel in the Shadow Realm (see Chapter 11 for additional information about this region).

SHADOW CORRUPTION

The Shadow Realm pushes its tendrils into places and creatures it can reach. Striking bargains with dark powers, lingering too long in places infused with Shadow, and even simply eating the wrong food in Shadow Realm can confer a lingering taint.

Creatures corrupted by Shadow grow distracted and withdrawn, shunning light in all its forms. At the most severe levels, the corrupted creature gives itself wholly to the Shadow Realm. Constructs, fiends, and undead aren't susceptible to shadow corruption. Constructs (other than gearforged or similar construct-like creatures) lack souls, and darkness of another sort already claims the essential nature of fiends and undead.

Shadow corruption is measured in six levels. An effect can give a creature one or more levels of shadow corruption, as specified in the effect's description.

Level	Effect
1	Disadvantage on Wisdom and Charisma checks made against non-shadow creatures
2	Gains darkvision out to 30 feet, or increases existing darkvision by 30 feet
3	Disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and attack rolls made while in bright light
4	Disadvantage on saving throws made while in bright light
5	Starting turn in sunlight causes 2d6 radiant damage
6	Becomes a shadow thrall (see condition below)

If a corrupted creature suffers another effect that causes shadow corruption, its current level of shadow corruption increases by the amount specified in the effect's description. A creature suffers the effect of its current level of shadow corruption as well as all lower levels.

An effect that removes shadow corruption reduces its level, as specified in the effect's description, with all shadow corruption effects ending if a creature's shadow corruption level is reduced below 1.

For each week spent in the Shadow Realm, a susceptible creature must make a DC 10 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, the creature gains 1 level of shadow corruption. On a success, the creature resists corruption for the time being, but the DC of future saves made for this reason increase by 1. The DC returns to 10 when the creature gains one or more levels of shadow corruption, or when it spends at least one week outside the Shadow Realm.

Shadow magic is dangerous for mortal creatures to wield, since it carries the risk of shadow corruption. Whenever any humanoid that isn't a shadow fey casts any shadow magic spells, the next time it finishes a long rest it must make a Charisma saving throw, with a DC of 10 + the highest level of shadow magic spell cast. On a failure, the creature gains one level of shadow corruption. Gnomes, elfmarked, and elves make the saving throw with advantage.

Shadow corruption can be removed in two ways:

- A corrupted creature that spends one week per current level of shadow corruption outside the Shadow Realm reduces its level of shadow corruption by 1. If the creature casts or is affected by a shadow magic spell during this time, the recovery time starts over.

- A *dispel evil and good* spell cast on a creature reduces its shadow corruption level by 1.

SHADOW-TOUCHED

A creature that is native to the Shadow Realm or that possesses at least 1 level of shadow corruption is considered shadow-touched.

NEW CONDITION: DESPONDENT

- A despondent creature gains the following flaw: "I find it difficult to see how anything could turn out well no matter how hard I try. Why even bother?"
- The creature has disadvantage on ability checks.
- The creature has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and disadvantage on all other saving throws.
- *Calm emotions* suppresses the despondent condition for its duration. *Lesser restoration* or more powerful magic ends the condition.

NEW CONDITION: SHADOW THRALL

- The shadow thrall is considered a denizen of the Shadow Realm and won't willingly leave. If forced to leave, it becomes despondent until it returns.
- The thrall's form becomes mottled with shifting patches of inky blackness. It automatically fails all Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma checks against a non-shadow creature, with the exception of Intimidation checks.
- The thrall is considered charmed by any fey or shadow fey native to the Shadow Realm who has an Intelligence or Charisma score higher than 14. This charmed effect can't be removed as long as the creature is a shadow thrall, but it can be suppressed.

VOID MAGIC

Ancient stories tell of the creation of all existence by means of spoken words that spun reality from the void. The words of creation are powerful, but—as light creates shadow—so too does creation cause destruction. Whispers of the ancient words of creation seeped into the narrow spaces between existence and nonexistence, and those whispers echo to this day. The power-hungry, the desperate, and the mad can find such whispers—with great effort and terrible risk. When spoken aloud or inscribed correctly, these words draw the power of nonexistence into the speaker's magic.

The ultimate source of the power that drives void magic is unclear. In most respects, a void magic spell is nearly identical to conventional magic and reaches toward the same mystical forces for its energy. The addition of Void Speech into the spell's verbal component, however, subtly alters the spell at the moment of casting, so that the spell reaches beyond the usual wells of arcane or divine power to siphon energy from strange realms of darkness, madness, and horror.

Several hypotheses exist to explain void magic's origin, from tapping the power of the Great Old Ones to drawing the last energy of a dying multiverse, but the truth is knotted in an enigma that can't be untied without tangling oneself in madness.

VOID SPEECH

At the heart of the enigmatic and dangerous school of void magic lies Void Speech. The glyphs and spoken words of the void are the essence of oblivion given form. They exist in a paradoxical state, and as such, they corrupt and degrade physical reality around them. Void Speech is dangerous under any circumstance, even when not infused into magic. Those who hear correctly enunciated Void Speech find it impossible to comprehend, but they know in their bones that what they hear is terrible. Splitting headaches, sudden nosebleeds, spoiled food, and cracked glass follow a Void Speech pronouncement by a particularly powerful speaker.

Inscribed void glyphs are not much safer. Readers often bleed from the eyes or suffer blurred vision. Paper bearing a glyph blackens over time, and even stone carved with the blasphemous glyphs eventually takes on a slimy texture and becomes pitted, corrupt, and foul. Explorers and scholars who stumble across a preserved void glyph have gone mad from the sudden shock to their souls. Despite the corrupting nature of such glyphs, the substance upon which they're inscribed never seems to degenerate completely—it rots and becomes loathsome, but it seemingly lasts forever in that corrupted state.

VOID SPEECH IN MIDGARD

Void Speech serves specific roles in the *Midgard Campaign Setting*. In the Western Wastes, massive, alien beings known to the inhabitants as Great Old Ones lumber across the blasted land. Dust goblins, selang, and aberrations scamper in the creatures' shadows and crawl over their twisted bodies in worship. These beings were originally called to Midgard from beyond the stars by Void Speech incantations. Their coming was a disaster that devastated the once fertile plains. Shamans and sorcerers among the twisted dust goblin tribes have puzzled out bits of Void Speech and wield the dark magic against their enemies.

In the Southlands, Void Speech is most prevalent in the Abandoned Lands. The ramag are well aware of Void Speech and the horrors void magic can unleash. They ruthlessly hunt down any rumors of void glyphs or speakers to cleanse that taint from the world. They struggle with unstable gateways and unpredictable magic, due in no small part to void magic.

It's no coincidence that in both locations, Void Speech exists in lands poisoned by magic gone awry and hostile to life.

Nurtured in Darkness

Void Speech and the magic that derives from it thrive in the darkest places of creation. The Great Old Ones murmur it to their followers during the cultists' grimmest nightmares. Creatures that dwell far from mortal worlds in the frigid black expanses between the stars came upon the secrets long ago, catching whispers in the silence. Void dragons, star-spawn, and other hoarders of ancient knowledge and power possess scraps of the speech cultivated into power.

Chief among earthly creatures who gather and study the power of the void are the aboleths. Those ancient creatures discovered Void Speech long ago, when the nihileth returned from distant wanderings. Void Speech formed the basis of the maddening glyph language that adorns their sunken cities.

Wherever anyone utters Void Speech, no matter how well meaning, darkness follows. Things from beyond hear the call and can follow its echo into existence. With sufficient study and preparation, a speaker into the void can protect him or herself from the brunt of the horrors that arise and even turn deadly manifestations against foes. No amount of caution in using Void Speech and magic, however, can completely shield a practitioner from its corrupting nature. The void will have its due.

Gifts from the Void

When the multiverse was whispered into being by the first words of creation, there was an echo of that generative moment. Nothingness, a dark reflection left behind in contrast to All That Is; the Void is All That Is Not. A place of dark, cold, and madness, the Void is beyond the reason and understanding of mortal creatures. Even the gods themselves fear to stare into that yawning gap between the planes, save those already slipping into the grip of madness or nihilism. It is said that the terrifying artifacts, the spheres of annihilation are pieces of the Void itself, trapped within bounded reality.

There are other objects, some mere trinkets, others of great and terrible power, that hold a sliver of the Void within them. These items are the *black phial*, *kyshaarth's fang*, *nullifier's lexicon*, *rift orb*, *voidskin cloak*, and the *Voidwalker*. These items can be found in this book.

Void Magic Feats

Under normal circumstances (or what passes for normal where Void Speech is concerned), only wizards can learn void magic. The following two feats make it possible for any character to channel the power of Void Speech in a limited way. At the GM's discretion, a wizard with a void magic feat may be able to learn void magic spells without finding them in written form, as if he or she was a void savant (see page 406).

VOID CHANNELER

As an action, you can speak aloud a word or short phrase in Void Speech. One creature of your choice within 10 feet that can hear you must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against this magic (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier) or be frightened of you for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Other creatures who can hear you suffer minor reactions to the Void Speech such as spontaneous nosebleeds, headaches, bits of hair falling out, and other unsettling effects. The first time you use this ability, you suffer no adverse effect. If you use it again before completing a short or long rest, you take 1d4 necrotic damage. Each additional time you use it before finishing a rest, the necrotic damage increases by 1d4.

VOID SCRIBE

As an action, you can use a writing medium to inscribe a magical void glyph on an unattended object within reach. As long as the glyph remains intact, the object is vulnerable to necrotic damage and it takes 1d6 necrotic damage at the end of your turn.

For the glyph to remain intact, you must concentrate on it as if concentrating on a spell. In addition to the normal demands of concentration, you must also make a successful DC 10 Constitution saving throw at the start of your turn or the glyph crumbles and ceases to function.

Void-Touched: Warped Flesh and Twisted Minds

Forgotten voices whisper from places darker than deepest Shadow, promising power. Moldering tomes, covered in script whose very letters and sigils cause gorge to rise and stone to rot, hold secrets lost to the sane world. The Void lingers just out of reach but ever seeking entry. It is the space between planes, emptiness leftover from when the multiverse came into being: a place of living non-existence. It is the nothing whose contrast gives meaning to the whole of creation. Its existence and the nightmarish creatures spawned by it are a mind-bending enigma, the answer to which eludes the most learned sages. In truth, the sane mortal mind is incapable of fully fathoming the Void—which is why those who study its depths are all quite mad.

The Void offers power and knowledge, for it touches all places and times, but everything it offers comes with a price. The desperate or foolhardy often agree to its terms without understanding what it is they do. Other beings of great power begin their study secure in the belief that their might will save them. The greatest of these are the void dragons of Midgard who soar in the darkness between stars. There in the cold sidereal emptiness, the Void grows close. The void dragons slipped past the nihil-boundary in the dark reaches of space and gazed long and deep into the Void. Even they are irrevocably broken and carry the Void's touch with them into the world.

Even some creatures spawned of the world and planes known to mortals carry a touch of the Void within them, like a splinter in the soul. Many aberrations are so touched, their bizarre habits, nightmarish physical forms, and alien mindsets giving terrifying testament to the corruptive influence. Aboleths, in particular, long ago snatched secrets from it and included aspects of Void Speech into their strange glyph language. These symbols corrupt and twist the very stone into which they are carved and taint the natural world in their vicinity. Void energies similarly reach out to many undead creatures, finding resonance and purchase within the antithesis of life that necrotic energy and undeath represent. Places where undead and aberrations dwell in numbers or where they often spawn can sometimes bear flaws in the walls of reality—areas that have worn thin between *what is* and *what is not*.

Touch of the Void

The Void exists outside the realm of sanity and form. Creatures exist there, spawned by unknown powers and processes, who constantly seek entry into the living, physical world. More than that, the Void itself seems almost alive or at least under some constant pressure to spread and expand—to consume. Creatures who taste its power expose themselves to its touch, and that touch is corruptive. It bears a taint that seeps into physical, spiritual, and mental being. Void magic is powerful and often destructive, its spells reinforced with the blasphemous intonations of Void Speech, and it is the most common way for mortals, particularly adventurers, to have their first brush with the Void's taint. Lore and knowledge gathered from tainted sources or the mind-bending unreality of the Void itself seep into a creature's mind and soul. Even some places become spiritually toxic if the barrier to the existing world wears thin or breaks.

Whenever a character is exposed to Void taint, it risks losing a small piece of itself to that influence. The Void attacks the very reality of the exposed character, overwriting a fragment of the character's personal reality with its own twisted version. An exposed character must make a Charisma saving throw with a DC set by the severity of the exposure. A wizard character of the Void Speaker Arcane Tradition or a character who possesses a Void Magic feat has advantage on saving throws made to resist Void taint.

Void Taint Effects

On a failed save, the character suffers one point of Void taint and is afflicted with short-term madness. On a success, the character might still be shaken or upset by the experience but suffers no ill effects. Once a character has succeeded on a saving throw against a particular type of Void exposure, it is unaffected by further exposures of the same type until it finishes a long rest.

Void taint is a cumulative measure of the Void's influence and corruption of a creature. When the character's Void taint reaches a threshold equal to its proficiency bonus + its Charisma modifier (minimum of 1), it is afflicted with indefinite madness, and its Void taint resets to zero. If a character has any Void Magic feats, it can add the number of Void Magic feats it possesses to its maximum threshold of Void taint. A Void Speaker wizard doubles its total Void taint threshold. Accumulated Void taint is permanent until the creature reaches its threshold.

Sometimes, the Void's touch manifests in a physical fashion, rather than a spiritual or mental one. Characters can maintain their sanity by containing their growing Void taint within their own bodies. Such a measure isn't without cost as the sliver of the Void works its way into the character's flesh and changes it in ways ranging from subtle to terrifying. A character who uses this option isn't afflicted by indefinite madness but instead suffers a flesh warp.

A flesh warp is a physical deformity that immediately overtakes the character's body. Flesh warps are unsettling things and impose disadvantage on Charisma checks for any purpose other than intimidation made against a creature not of the Void. A flesh warp lasts until cured.

Curing Flesh Warps and Void Taint

A *greater restoration* spell cast on a character with Void taint removes one point of taint in addition to the spell's normal effects if the target of the spell succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. Flesh warps are permanent manifestations of the Void within the body of a tainted character and are incredibly difficult to remove. A *regeneration* spell or more powerful magic is required to rid a character of a flesh warp.

Void Exposure	Charisma Save DC
Finishes a rest within a Void-tainted area	10
Learns Void-tainted lore	10
Attunes a Void-tainted magic item	15
Learns a Void magic spell	10+spell level
Subjected to a Void magic spell of 6th level or higher	Caster's spell save DC
Encounters a creature of the Void for the first time	10 + creature's Charisma modifier
Exposed to the Void itself	20

FLESH WARPS

d10	Effect (lasts until cured)
1	**Bulging Eye**. One of the character's eyes grows disproportionately large and discolored. The character has disadvantage on ranged attacks made against targets farther than 30 ft. away but can take the Search action as a bonus action.
2	**Eyeless**. The character's eyes rot away, vanish (leaving behind smooth flesh), or otherwise become useless. The character permanently gains the blinded condition. This condition can't be removed without curing this flesh warp. The character's other senses are enhanced by the Void, granting blindsight to a range of 10 ft. as long as the character can hear.
3	**Gleaming Skin**. The character's skin takes on a waxy, unnatural sheen. It might be pale, translucent, or even crystalline in appearance. The gleam grants advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks made to locate the character by sight. While the character is in bright light and is hit by a melee attack, it can use its reaction to add 1 to its armor class if the attacker can see its skin.
4	**Scales**. The character's skin grows scales, bony plates, or becomes thick and leathery, granting an armor class of 14 + Dexterity modifier. The character's skin is also less pliant and numb and imposes disadvantage on Dexterity checks.
5	**Slime**. The character's skin produces a slick, gelatinous oil that ruins clothing and stains objects the character touches. It also provides advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks to avoid or escape a grapple or slip out of bonds, and it allows the creature to pass through spaces large enough for a creature one size smaller than itself without squeezing. The slime trail grants advantage on checks made to track the character.
6	**Stench**. The character exudes the stink of rotting flesh, acrid chemicals, sickly sweet perfume, or some other odious aroma. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 ft. of the character must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of the creature's next turn. This stink clings to any objects that have been in the character's possession for 24 hours. Attempting to sell any such object may be impossible or yields only half the normal price at best. Food in the character's possession spoils after 24 hours.
7	**Talons**. The character's fingers and toes sprout sharp talons or claws. The character can use the talons to make unarmed strikes that deal 1d4 plus Strength modifier slashing damage. The character has disadvantage on Dexterity checks involving fine manipulation with its hands and can't wear close-toed footwear.
8	**Tentacles**. One of the character's hands twists into a nest of writhing tentacles. Any check or saving throw made to maintain grip or grapple with the tentacles has advantage. Any check or saving throw involving fine motor control or Dexterity using the tentacles has disadvantage.
9	**Tusks**. The character grows large tusks. The character can use the tusks to make unarmed strikes that deal 1d4 plus Strength modifier piercing damage. The tusks interfere with the target's speech. If it casts a spell with a verbal component that has a casting time longer than 1 round, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw to successfully cast the spell.
10	**Twisted Teeth**. Snaggleteeth grow in haphazard dips of flesh resembling mouths on random parts of the character's body. If the character is grappling a creature at the start of its turn, the teeth deal 1d4 piercing damage to the grappled creature. While the character wears medium or heavy armor or heavy clothing, the teeth ache and grind against the armor, causing disadvantage on Wisdom checks due to discomfort and distraction.

NEW INDEFINITE MADNESS

d10	Flaw (lasts until cured)
1	"I am obsessed with discovering the hidden meaning in seemingly random objects, such as shards of smashed glass."
2	"Some event in my life never happened. I won't acknowledge it or anything to do with it."
3	"I can hear them whispering, always whispering. They're loudest near corners of rooms and other angles in structures."
4	"I constantly scrawl a certain set of strange glyphs without realizing it, sometimes even so far as to cut them into my own skin."
5	"When I'm excited or upset, some of my words come out in a different language. One that I don't actually speak or understand."
6	"The trappings and symbol of a certain deity cause me great pain to look upon or touch."
7	"Ordered collections of objects are fascinating, and I have to study and count them."
8	"I collect strange or disgusting trinkets, such as teeth of creatures I kill or scrapings of dirt from everywhere I sleep."
9	"The music is always with me, and I have to let it out. It doesn't matter that no one else finds the song as beautiful as I do."
10	"I hear scratching just on the other side of interior walls."

SPELLS

The following lists show which spells correspond with which spellcasting classes.

ANTIPALADIN SPELLS

1st Level
Bloody Smite
Doom of the Cracked Shield
Hobble Mount
Hone Blade
Memento Mori

Stanch 2nd Level
Animate Ghoul
As You Were
Caustic Blood
Doom of Consuming Fire
Doom of the Slippery Rogue
Timely Distraction
Vomit Tentacles

3rd Level
Conjure Undead
Doom of Blue Crystal
Doom of Dancing Blades
Doom of Disenchantment
St. Blusen's Reaver Spirit
St. Whiteskull's Borrowing
Strength of the Underworld
Vital Mark

4th Level
Doom of the Earthen Maw
Doom of Serpent Coils
St. Parvalas's Risen Road
Shroud of Death
Visage of Madness

5th Level
Sanguine Horror

BARD SPELLS

1st Level
Screaming Ray

3rd Level
Throes of Ecstasy

4th Level
Lovesick

5th Level
Kiss of the Succubus

CLERIC SPELLS

1st Level
Find Kin
Stanch

2nd Level
Blood Lure
Boreas's Breath

3rd Level
Alone
Throes of Ecstasy
Vital Mark

4th Level
Hirvsth's Call
Lovesick

5th Level
Cruor of Visions
Exsanguinate
Exsanguinating Cloud
Kiss of the Succubus

6th Level
Winter's Radiance

7th Level
Glacial Fog
Ice Soldiers

9th Level
Mammon's Due

DRUID SPELLS

Cantrips (0 Level)
Shiver
Stanch

2nd Level
Boreas's Breath
Caustic Blood

3rd Level
Perun's Doom

6th Level
Winter's Radiance

7th Level
Glacial Fog
Ice Soldiers

8th Level
Tundra-Touched

PALADIN SPELLS

1st Level
Find Kin
Stanch

3rd Level
Vital Mark

4th Level
Hirvsth's Call

RANGER SPELLS

1st Level
Stanch

2nd Level
Boreas's Breath
Caustic Blood

4th Level
Blood Spoor

SORCERER SPELLS

Cantrips (0 Level)
Blood Tide

1st Level
Bloody Hands
Screaming Ray
Stanch
Weapon of Blood
Writhing Arms

2nd Level
Blood Lure
Bloodshot
Caustic Blood

3rd Level
Alone
Blood Armor
Doom of Caelmarath
Ire of the Mountain
Perun's Doom
Rune of Imprisonment
Throes of Ecstasy
Vital Mark

4th Level
Blood and Steel
Lovesick

5th Level
Cruor of Visions
Essence Instability
Exsanguinating Cloud
Kiss of the Succubus

6th Level
Winter's Radiance

7th Level
Glacial Fog
Ice Soldiers

WARLOCK SPELLS

1st Level
Bloody Hands
Stanch
Writhing Arms

2nd Level
Bloodshot
Caustic Blood

3rd Level
Alone
Blood Armor
Ire of the Mountain
Throes of Ecstasy

4th Level
Lovesick

5th Level
Cruor of Visions
Exsanguinate
Kiss of the Succubus
Sanguine Horror

9th Level
Mammon's Due

WIZARD SPELLS

Cantrips (0 Level)
Blood Tide
Crushing Curse
Word of Misfortune

1st Level
Bloody Hands
Protection from the Void
Screaming Ray
Stanch
Weapon of Blood
Writhing Arms

2nd Level
Blood Lure
Bloodshot
Boreas's Breath
Caustic Blood
Destructive Resonance
Maddening Whispers
Perun's Doom

3rd Level
Alone
Blood Armor
Doom of Caelmarath
Ire of the Mountain
Locate Red Portal
Rune of Imprisonment
Throes of Ecstasy
Vital Mark
Void Strike

4th Level
Blood and Steel
Lovesick
Nether Weapon

5th Level
Conjure Minor Voidborn
Cruor of Visions
Essence Instability
Exsanguinate
Exsanguinating Cloud
Living Shadows
Reset Red Portal
Kiss of the Succubus

6th Level
Life Drain
Seal Red Portal
Winter's Radiance

7th Level
Conjure Voidborn
Glacial Fog
Ice Soldiers

8th Level
Glimpse of the Void

9th Level
Mammon's Due
Open Red Portal
Void Rift

ALONE

3rd-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You cause the target creature to believe its allies have been banished to a different realm. The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or it treats its allies as if they were invisible and silenced. The affected creature cannot target, perceive, or otherwise interact with its allies for the duration of the spell. If one of its allies hits it with a melee attack, the affected creature can make another Wisdom saving throw. If it succeeds, the spell's effects end.

ANIMATE GHOUL

2nd-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M (piece of rotting flesh and an onyx gemstone worth 100 gp)
Duration: Instantaneous

You raise one Medium or Small humanoid corpse as a ghoul under your control. Any class levels or abilities the creature had in life are gone, replaced by the standard ghoul stat block.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level, it can be used on the corpse of a Large humanoid to create a Large ghoul. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level, this spell creates a ghast, but the material component changes to an onyx gemstone worth at least 200 gp.

AS YOU WERE

2nd-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 10 minutes

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a piece of flesh from a creature of the target's race)

Duration: Up to 24 hours

When cast on a dead or undead body, *as you were* returns that creature to the appearance it had in life while it was healthy and uninjured. The target must have a physical body; the spell fails automatically if the target is normally noncorporeal (banshee, ghost, wraith, et al.).

If *as you were* is cast on a corpse, its effect is identical to *gentle repose* except that the corpse's appearance is restored to that of a healthy, uninjured (albeit dead) person.

If the target is an undead creature, it also is restored to the appearance it had in life, even if it died from disease or from severe wounds, or centuries ago. The target looks, smells, and sounds (if it can talk) as it did in life. Friends and family can tell something is wrong only with a successful Wisdom (Insight) check against your spell save DC, and only if they have reason to be suspicious (knowing the person should be dead is sufficient reason). Spells and abilities that detect undead are also fooled, but the creature remains susceptible to Turn Undead as normal.

This spell doesn't confer speech on undead that normally can't speak. The creature eats, drinks, and breathes as a living creature does; it can mimic sleep, but it has no more need for it than it had before. Any amount of radiant, necrotic, or Constitution damage immediately ends this spell.

If this spell is cast on an undead creature that isn't your ally or under your control, it makes a Charisma saving throw to resist the effect.

BLOOD AND STEEL

4th-level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V,S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

When you cast this spell, you cut your hand and take 1d4 slashing damage that can't be healed until you take a long rest. Then touch a construct; it must make a successful Constitution saving throw or be charmed by you for the duration. If you or your allies are fighting the construct, it has advantage on the saving throw. Even constructs that are immune to charm can be affected by this spell.

While the construct is charmed, you have a telepathic link with it as long as the two of you are on the same plane of existence. You can use this telepathic link to issue commands to the creature while you are conscious (no action required), which it does its best to obey. You can specify a simple and general course of action, such as "attack the ghouls," "block the bridge," or "fetch that bucket." If the construct completes the order and doesn't receive further direction from you, it defends itself.

You can use your action to take total and precise control of the target. Until the end of your next turn, the construct takes only the actions you specify and does nothing you haven't ordered it to do. During this time, you can also cause the construct to use a reaction, but this requires you to use your own reaction as well.

Each time the construct takes damage, it makes a new Constitution saving throw against the spell. If the saving throw succeeds, the spell ends.

If the construct is already under your control when the spell is cast, it gains an Intelligence of 10 (unless its own Intelligence is higher, in which case it retains the higher score) for 4 hours. The construct is capable of acting independently, though it remains loyal to you for the spell's duration. You can also grant the target a bonus equal to your Intelligence modifier on one skill in which you have proficiency.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell with a 5th-level spell slot, the duration is concentration, up to 10 minutes. When you use a 6th-level spell slot, the duration is concentration, up to 1 hour. When you use a spell slot of 7th level or higher, the duration is concentration, up to 8 hours.

BLOOD ARMOR

3rd-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 bonus action

Range: Self

Components: V, S (you must have just struck a foe with a melee weapon)

Duration: 1 hour

When you strike a foe with a melee weapon attack, you can immediately cast *blood armor* as a bonus action. The foe you struck must contain blood; targets that don't bleed don't satisfy the requirement for *blood armor*. The blood flowing from your foe magically increases in volume and forms a suit of armor around you, granting you armor class 18 + your Dexterity modifier for the spell's duration. Blood armor has no Strength requirement, doesn't hinder spellcasting, and doesn't incur disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

If the creature you struck was celestial, *blood armor* also grants you advantage on Charisma saving throws.

BLOOD LURE

2nd-level enchantment [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 10 ft.

Components: V, S, M (blood pool)

Duration: 1 minute

You point at any open liquid (a jar, a bowl, even a puddle) that contains at least a quart of blood. It flashes momentarily with sparkling light before regaining its former hue. Predators and creatures that feed on blood, including undead such as vampires, within 60 feet must make Charisma saving throws. Creatures with Keen Smell or any similar scent boosting ability have disadvantage on the saving throw, while undead that feed on blood have advantage on the saving throw. Those that fail are drawn toward the blood and must move toward it unless impeded.

Once an affected creature reaches the blood, it tries to consume it, foregoing all other actions while the blood is present. A successful attack against an affected creature ends the effect, as does the complete consumption of the blood, which requires just 1 action by an affected creature.

BLOOD SPOOR

4th-level divination [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a drop of the quarry's blood)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

By touching a drop of your quarry's blood (spilled or drawn within the past hour), you can follow its trail unerringly across any surface or under water, no matter how fast you are moving. If your quarry takes flight, you can follow its trail along the ground or through the air if you have means to fly.

If your quarry moves magically (such as through a *dimension door* or via a *teleport* spell), you sense its trail as a straight path from where the magical movement started to where it ended. Such a vector may lead through lethal or impassable barriers. This spell even reveals the path of those using *pass without trace*, but it fails to locate creatures protected by *nondetection* or by other effects that prevent *scrying* or cause *divination* spells to fail. If your quarry moves to another plane, its trail ends without trace, but *blood spoor* picks up the trail again if the caster shifts to the same plane as the quarry before the spell expires.

BLOOD TIDE

Necromancy cantrip [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 25 ft.

Components: V

Duration: 4 rounds

When you cast this spell, the targeted creature must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or bleed from its nose, eyes, ears, and mouth. This bleeding causes no damage but imposes a –2 penalty on the creature's Intelligence, Charisma, and Wisdom checks. *Blood tide* has no effect on undead or constructs.

A bleeding creature might also attract the attention of creatures such as stirges, sharks, or giant mosquitoes, depending on the circumstances.

A *cure wounds* spell stops the bleeding before the spell's duration expires, as does a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

The duration increases to 2 minutes at 5th level, 10 minutes at 11th level, and 1 hour at 17th level.

BLOODSHOT

2nd-level conjuration [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 40 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You launch a jet of boiling blood from your eyes at a target within 40 feet of you. You take 1d6 necrotic damage and make a ranged spell attack against the target. If the attack hits, the target takes 2d10 fire damage plus 2d8 psychic damage.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the fire damage increases by 1d10 for each slot level above 2nd.

BLOODY HANDS

1st-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You cause the hands of the target to bleed profusely. The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or take 1 necrotic damage each round and suffer disadvantage on all melee and ranged attack rolls using its hands (or other appropriate body part such as claws or tentacles) for the duration of the spell.

Casting any spell with somatic or material components while under the influence of this spell requires a DC 10 Constitution saving throw; failure means the spell can be attempted again in the next round, rather than lost.

BLOODY SMITE

1st-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 bonus action

Range: Self

Components: V

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

The next time you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack during the spell's duration, your weapon pulses with a dull, red light and the attack deals an extra 1d6 necrotic damage to the target. At the start of each of its turns until the spell ends, the target must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 1d6 necrotic damage, it bleeds profusely from the mouth, and it can't speak intelligibly or cast spells with a verbal component. On a successful save, the spell ends. If the target or an ally within 5 feet of it uses an action to tend the wound with a successful Wisdom (Medicine) check against your spell save DC or the target receives magical healing, the spell ends.

BOREAS'S BREATH

2nd-level transmutation (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You freeze standing water in a 20-foot cube, or running water in a 10-foot cube, originating from you. The water turns to solid ice. The surface becomes difficult terrain and any creature finishing its turn on the ice must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

Creatures partially submerged in the water when it freezes become partially trapped. They are restrained and can use an action to make a Strength check against your spell DC to break free.

Creatures fully submerged in the water when it freezes become fully trapped. They are restrained, incapacitated and cannot breath. As an action, a fully-trapped creature can attempt to break free with a successful DC 25 Strength check.

Any creature trapped in the ice at the end of its turn takes 1d6 (if partially trapped) or 2d6 (if fully trapped) cold damage. The ice has 10 AC and 15 hit points. It is resistant to nonmagical slashing, bludgeoning and piercing damage and is vulnerable to fire damage.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd or higher, increase the size of the cube by 10 feet for each spell slot level above 2nd.

CAUSTIC BLOOD

2nd-level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 reaction

Range: Self

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, special

Your blood becomes caustic when exposed to the air. When you take damage, you can use your reaction to select up to three targets within 30 feet of you. Each target takes 1d10 acid damage unless it makes a successful Dexterity saving throw.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the number of targets increases by 1 for each slot level above 2nd.

CONJURE UNDEAD

3rd-level conjuration [blood]

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (a humanoid skull)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You summon a shadow to do your bidding. The creature appears in an unoccupied space that you can see within range. The creature is friendly to you and your allies for the duration. Roll initiative for the shadow, which has its own turns. It obeys any verbal commands that you issue to it (no action required by you). If you don't issue any commands to the creature, it defends itself from hostile creatures but otherwise takes no actions. The shadow disappears when the spell ends.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level, you can choose to summon a wight or a shadow. When you cast this spell with a spell slot of 5th level, you can choose to summon a ghost, a shadow, or a wight.

CONJURE MINOR VOIDBORN

5th-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: 90 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You summon fiends or aberrations that appear in unoccupied spaces you can see within range. You choose one of the following options for what appears:

- One creature of challenge rating 2 or lower
- Two creatures of challenge rating 1 or lower
- Four creatures of challenge rating 1/2 or lower
- Eight creatures of challenge rating 1/4 or lower

Summoned creatures disappear when they drop to 0 hit points or when the spell ends.

The summoned creatures do not directly attack you or your companions. Roll initiative for the summoned creatures as a group; they take their own turns on their initiative result. They attack your enemies and try to stay within 90 feet of you, but they control their own actions. The summoned creatures despise being bound, so they might harm or impede you and your companions with secondary effects (but not direct attacks) if the opportunity arises. At the beginning of the creatures' turn, you can use your reaction to verbally command them. They obey your commands for that turn, and you take 1d6 psychic damage at the end of the turn.

If your concentration is broken, the creatures don't disappear. Instead, you can no longer command them and they become hostile to you and your companions. They will attack you and your allies if they believe they have a chance to win the fight or to inflict meaningful harm, but they won't fight if they fear it would mean their own death. The creatures can't be dismissed by you, but they disappear 1 hour after being summoned.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a 7th- or 9th-level spell slot, you choose one of the summoning options above, and more creatures appear—twice as many with a 7th-level spell slot and three times as many with a 9th-level spell slot.

CONJURE VOIDBORN

7th-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 90 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You summon a fiend or aberration of challenge rating 6 or lower, which appears in an unoccupied space that you can see within range. The creature disappears when it drops to 0 hit points or when the spell ends.

Roll initiative for the creature, which takes its own turns. It attacks the nearest creature on its turn. At the start of the fiend's turn, you can use your reaction to command the creature by speaking in Void Speech. It obeys your verbal command, and you take 2d6 psychic damage at the end of the creature's turn.

If your concentration is broken, the creature doesn't disappear. Instead you can no longer issue commands to the fiend, and it becomes hostile to you and your companions. It will attack you and your allies if it believes it has a chance to win the fight or to inflict meaningful harm, but it won't fight if it fears it would mean its own death. The creature can't be dismissed by you, but it disappears 1 hour after you summoned it.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 8th level or higher, the challenge rating increases by 1 for each slot level above 7th.

CRUOR OF VISIONS

5th-level divination [blood]

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a bone needle and catch basin)

Duration: Concentration, up to 5 minutes

You prick your finger with a bone needle as you cast this spell, taking 1 necrotic damage. This drop of blood must be caught in a container such as a platter or a bowl, where it grows into a pool 1 foot in diameter. This pool acts as a crystal ball for the purpose of scrying.

If you place a drop (or dried flakes) of another creature's blood in the cruor of visions, the creature has disadvantage on any Wisdom saving throw to resist scrying. Additionally, you can treat the pool of blood as a *crystal ball of telepathy* (see the *crystal ball* description in the core rules).

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 7th level or higher, the pool of blood acts as either a *crystal ball of mind reading* or a *crystal ball of true seeing* (your choice when the spell is cast).

CRUSHING CURSE

Void magic cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You speak a word of Void Speech. Choose a creature you can see within range. If the target can hear you, it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or take 1d6 psychic damage and be deafened for 1 minute. A deafened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the deafness on a success. A creature deafened in this way can still hear Void Speech.

This spell's damage increases by 1d6 when you reach 5th level (2d6), 11th level (3d6), and 17th level (4d6).

DESTRUCTIVE RESONANCE

2nd-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (15-foot cone)

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You shout a scathing string of Void Speech that assaults the minds of any creatures who hear it. Each creature in a 15-foot cone who can hear you takes 4d6 psychic damage, or half damage with a successful Wisdom saving throw. Creatures damaged by this spell can't take reactions until the start of their next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 2nd.

DOOM OF BLUE CRYSTAL

3rd-level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a blue crystal)

Duration: Concentration, up to 3 rounds

You are surrounded by a field of glowing, blue energy lasting 3 rounds. Creatures within 5 feet of you (including yourself) must make a Constitution saving throw when the spell is cast and again at the start of each of your turns while the spell is in effect. A creature whose saving throw fails is restrained; a restrained creature whose saving throw fails is paralyzed; and a paralyzed creature whose saving throw fails is petrified and transforms into a statue of blue crystal. As with all concentration spells, you can end the field at any time (no action required). If you turn to crystal, the energy field ends after all affected creatures make their saving throws. Restrained and paralyzed creatures recover immediately when the spell effect ends, but petrification is permanent.

Crystal creatures can see, hear, and smell normally, but they don't need to eat or breathe. If *shatter* is cast on a crystal creature, it must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or be killed. If a crystal statue is broken or damaged, the subject has similar damage when its petrification ends.

Creatures transformed into blue crystal can be restored with *dispel magic*, *greater restoration*, or comparable magic.

DOOM OF CAELMARATH

3rd-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S, F (dust from the Goblin Wastes)

Duration: 1 minute

You create a ripple of dark energy that destroys everything it touches. You create a 10-foot-radius, 10-foot-deep cylindrical extra-dimensional hole on a horizontal surface of sufficient size. Since it extends into another dimension, the pit has no weight and does not otherwise displace the original underlying material. You can create the pit in the deck of a ship as easily as in a dungeon floor or the ground of a forest.

Any creature standing in the original conjured space, or on an expanded space as it grows, must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw to avoid falling in. The sloped pit edges crumble continuously, and any creature adjacent to the pit when it expands must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw to avoid falling in. Creatures subjected to a successful pushing effect (such as by a spell like *gust of wind*) may not make this saving throw. Creatures who fall into the pit take falling damage as normal. The pit's radius expands 10 feet each round for the duration.

The walls of the pit are slick and slimy, requiring a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb. Creatures and objects that remain in the pit take 1d6 necrotic damage at the beginning of their turns. If you fall into your own pit, you take damage, then the spell ends and you are incapacitated for 2 rounds. When the spell ends, creatures within the pit must make a Constitution saving throw. Those who succeed rise up with the bottom of the pit until they are standing on the original surface. Those who fail also rise up but are stunned for 2 rounds.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, increase the depth of the pit by 10 feet for each slot level above 3rd.

DOOM OF CONSUMING FIRE

2nd-level evocation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a dead coal or a fistful of ashes)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

This spell wreathes you in cold, purple fire that damages creatures near you. You take 3 (1d6) cold damage each round for the duration of the spell. Creatures within 5 feet of you when you cast the spell, and at the start of your turns while the spell is in effect, take 4 (1d8) cold damage.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a slot of 3rd level, the radius of the spell extends to 10 feet, damage to you is 4 (1d8) cold damage, and damage to other creatures is 5 (1d10)cold damage. When you cast this spell using a slot of 4th level, the radius of the spell extends to 15 feet, damage to you is 5 (1d10) cold damage, and damage to other creatures is 6 (1d12) cold damage. When you cast this spell using a slot of 5th level, the radius of the spell extends to 20 feet, damage to you is 6 (1d12) cold damage, and damage to other creatures is 10 (1d20) cold damage.

DOOM OF THE CRACKED SHIELD

1st-level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Until expended

Doom of the cracked shield is cast on a melee weapon. The next time that weapon is used, it destroys the target's nonmagical shield or damages nonmagical armor, in addition to the normal effects of the attack. If the foe is using a nonmagical shield, it crumbles into sawdust and rust. If the foe doesn't use a shield, its nonmagical armor is permanently reduced in effectiveness by 2 points. If the target doesn't use armor or a shield, the spell is expended with no effect.

DOOM OF DANCING BLADES

3rd-level illusion [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

When you cast *doom of dancing blades*, you create 1d4 illusory copies of your weapon that float in the air 5 feet from you. These images move with you, spinning, shifting, and mimicking your attacks. When you are hit by a melee attack but the attack roll was within 3 of your armor class, one illusory weapon parries the attack; you take no damage and the illusory weapon is destroyed. When you are hit by a melee attack that an illusory weapon can't parry (the attack roll succeeds by 4 or more), you take only half damage from the attack and an illusory weapon is destroyed. Spells and effects that don't require an attack roll or that affect an area affect you normally and don't destroy any illusory weapons.

If you make a melee attack that scores a critical hit while doom of dancing blades is in effect on you, all your illusory dancing blades also strike the target and do 1d8 bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage (your choice) each.

An attacker must be able to see the illusory weapons to be affected. The spell has no effect if you are invisible or in total darkness or on blind creatures.

DOOM OF DISENCHANTMENT

3rd-level abjuration [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 5 rounds

When you cast *doom of disenchantment*, your armor and shield glow with unholy light. When a creature hits you with an attack, the spell counters any augmenting magic granting the attack a bonus to hit (but not advantage) or bonus damage. For example, a +1 weapon would still be considered magical but it gets neither +1 to hit nor damage against a target under a *doom of disenchantment*.

The doom also momentarily suppresses other magical abilities or spell-like abilities of the attack. A *sword of wounding*, for example, can't cause ongoing wounds on you and you recover hit points normally. If the attack was a spell or spell-like ability, it's affected as if you'd cast *counterspell*, using Charisma as your spellcasting ability. Spells with a duration of instantaneous, however, are unaffected.

DOOM OF THE EARTHEN MAW

4th-level evocation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: 10 rounds

The ground within 30 feet of the point you designate turns into filthy and slippery muck, so that those in the area sink down to a watery death. This spell affects sand, earth, mud, or ice, but not stone, wood, or other material. For the duration, the ground in the affected area is difficult terrain. A creature in the area when you cast the spell must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be restrained by the mud until the spell ends. A restrained creature can free itself by using an action to make a successful Strength saving throw. Creatures that free themselves or that enter the area after the spell was cast are affected by the difficult terrain but don't become restrained.

Each round, a restrained creature sinks deeper into the muck. A Medium or smaller creature that is restrained for 3 rounds becomes completely submerged at the end of its third turn. A Large creature becomes submerged after 4 rounds. Submerged creatures begin suffocating if they aren't holding their breath. Creatures that are still submerged when the spell expires are sealed beneath the newly-solid ground. At that point, they can escape only if someone else digs them out or they have a burrowing speed.

DOOM OF SERPENT COILS

4th-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (vial of poison)

Duration: Instantaneous

You drink a dose of venom or other poison and through the unholy power of your dark god, you spread the effect to other living things around you. If the poison normally allows a saving throw, you fail it automatically. You suffer the effect of the poison normally before spreading the poison to all other living creatures within 10 feet of you. Instead of making the usual saving throw against the poison, creatures around you make a Constitution saving throw against the spell. A target whose saving throw succeeds suffers no damage or other effect from the poison and is immune to further castings of *doom of serpent coils* for 24 hours. Targets that fail the saving throw don't take the poison's usual effect; instead, they take 14 (4d6) poison damage and are poisoned. While poisoned this way, a creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn. On a failure, it takes 14 (4d6) poison damage and is still poisoned. On a success, it's no longer poisoned and it's immune to further castings of *doom of serpent coils* for 24 hours.

Multiple castings of *doom of serpent coils* have no additional effect against creatures that are already poisoned by it. The effect can also be ended by *protection from poison* or comparable magic.

DOOM OF THE SLIPPERY ROGUE

2nd-level conjuration [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 40 feet

Components: V, S, M (bacon fat)

Duration: 1 minute

A *doom of the slippery rogue* spell covers a 20-foot by 20 foot area of wall or floor with a thin coating of bacon fat or similar grease. Climbers must make a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check or immediately fall from the surface unless they're held in place by ropes or other climbing gear. A creature standing on an affected floor falls prone unless it makes a successful Dexterity saving throw. Movement through the affected area is done at half speed (this is cumulative with the usual halving for climbing), and any movement must be accompanied by a Dexterity (walking) or Strength (climbing) saving throw. If the saving throw fails, the moving creature falls.

ESSENCE INSTABILITY

5th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 minute

You cause the target to radiate a harmful aura. Both the target and every creature beginning or ending its turn within 20 feet of the target suffer 2d6 poison damage per round. The target can make a Constitution saving throw each round to negate the damage and end the affliction. Success means the target no longer takes damage from the aura, but the aura still persists around the target for the full duration.

Creatures affected by the aura must succeed on a Constitution saving throw each round to negate the damage. The aura moves with the original target and is unaffected by *gust of wind* and similar spells.

The aura does not detect as magic or poison, is invisible, odorless, and intangible (though the spell's presence can be detected on the original target). *Protection from poison* negates the spell's effects on targets but will not dispel the aura. A foot of metal or stone, two inches of lead, or a force effect such as *mage armor* or *wall of force* will block it.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, the aura lasts 1 minute longer and the poison damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 5th.

EXSANGUINATE

5th-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (a desiccated horse heart)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You cause a creature's body to become engorged with blood or ichor. You target one creature that you can see within range. The target must make a Constitution saving throw. If it succeeds, it suffers 2d6 bludgeoning damage. If it fails, each round until the spell ends, the creature takes 4d6 bludgeoning damage, its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken, and it is incapacitated, cannot speak, and cannot breathe, as it vomits up torrents of blood or ichor. At the end of each of its turns, an affected creature can make a Constitution saving throw. If it succeeds, the effect ends for that creature.

The reduction of its hit point maximum lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, target one additional creature for each spell slot level above 5th.

EXSANGUINATING CLOUD

5th-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 100 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 5 minutes

When you cast this spell, a rose-colored mist billows up from the spot you indicate within range, obscuring sight and draining blood from living creatures. The cloud spreads around corners. It lasts for the duration or until strong wind disperses it, ending the spell. Its area is heavily obscured.

This cloud leeches the blood or similar fluid from creatures in the area. It doesn't affect undead or constructs. Any creature in the cloud when it's created or at the start of your turn takes 21 (6d6) necrotic damage and gains one level of exhaustion; a successful Constitution saving throw halves the damage and prevents gaining exhaustion.

FIND KIN

1st-level divination (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: touch

Components: V, S, M (a freshly dug up tree root that is consumed by the spell)

Duration: Instantaneous

Touch one willing creature or make a melee spell attack on an unwilling creature. If the target fails a Wisdom saving throw, you learn the identity, appearance, and general location (such as "5 miles north" or "in the city of Vidim") of one random living blood relative of the target. A creature may choose to automatically fail this save.

GLACIAL FOG

7th-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

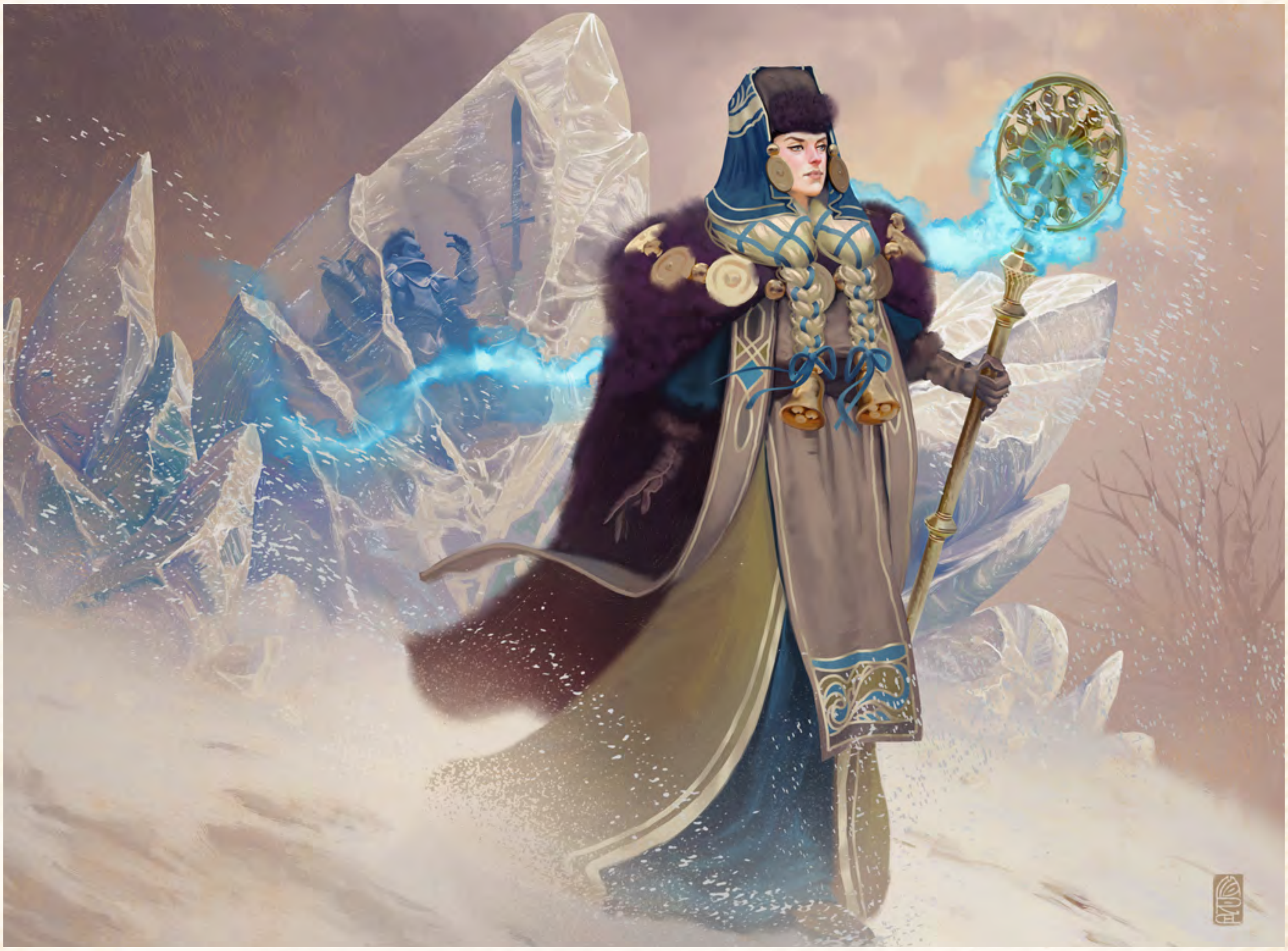
Range: 100 feet (30-foot sphere)

Components: V, S, M (crystalline statue of a polar bear worth at least 25g)

Duration: Instantaneous / Concentration up to 1 minute

Upon your final utterance, the target area is covered in a glacial fog which generates a limb numbing cold that causes 12d6 points of cold damage and inflicts one level of exhaustion. Creatures within the area have disadvantage on Perception checks. A successful Constitution saving throw halves the cold damage and negates the other effects. This damage is instantaneous and occurs only on the first round of the spell. While you maintain concentration on this spell, any creature within the area of effect that attempts any action requiring manual dexterity such as loading a crossbow, drawing a weapon, picking a lock, retrieving a stored item, or manipulating a material spell component must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw to do so. A failed check means the creature drops the item it is attempting to manipulate. The area inside the spell's area of effect is considered difficult terrain. Any creature beginning or ending a move within the spell's area of effect must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall prone.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 8th or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 7th.



GLIMPSE OF THE VOID

8th-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S, M (a scrap of parchment with void glyph scrawlings)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Muttering Void Speech, you force images of terror and nonexistence upon your foes. Each creature in a 30-foot cube within range must make an Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, the creature goes insane for the duration. While insane, a creature takes no actions other than to shriek, wail, gibber, and babble unintelligibly. The GM controls the creature's movement, which is erratic.

HIRVSTH'S CALL

4th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 minute

You summon a spectral herd of ponies to drag off a creature that you can see in range. The target must be no bigger than Large and must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a successful save, the spell has no effect. On a failed save, a spectral rope wraps around the target and pulls it 60 feet in a direction of your choosing as the herd races off. The ponies continue running in the chosen direction for the duration of the spell but will alter course to avoid impassable obstacles. Once you choose the direction, you cannot change it. The ponies ignore difficult terrain and are immune to damage.

The target is prone and immobilized but can use its action to make a Strength or Dexterity check against your spell DC to escape the spectral bindings. The target takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage for every 20 feet it is dragged by the ponies. The herd moves 60 feet each round at the beginning of your turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, target one additional creature for each spell slot level above 4th.

HOBBLE MOUNT

1st-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

When you cast *hobble mount* as a successful melee spell attack against a horse, wolf, or other four-legged or two-legged beast being ridden as a mount, that beast is disabled so that it can't move at its normal speed without incurring injury. An affected creature that moves more than half its base speed in a turn takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

This spell has no effect on a creature that your GM deems to not be a mount.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the damage increases by 2d6 for each slot level above 1st.

HONE BLADE

1st-level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a small whetstone or lodestone chip)

Duration: Until expended

You magically sharpen the edge of any bladed weapon or object. The target weapon gets +1 to damage on its next successful hit.

ICE SOLDIERS

7th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, M (vial of water)

Duration: 1 minute

You pour water from the vial and cause two ice soldiers to appear within range. The ice soldiers cannot form if there is no space available for them. The ice soldiers act immediately on your turn. You can mentally command them (no action required by you) to move and act where and how you desire. If you command an ice soldier to attack, it attacks that creature exclusively until the target is dead, at which time the soldier melts into a puddle of water. If an ice soldier moves further than 30 feet from you, it immediately melts. Ice soldiers have the statistics shown below.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 8th or higher, you create one additional ice soldier.

Ice Soldier

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 72 (16d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities cold

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages None

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Heavy Blows: Creatures struck by two slam attacks from an ice soldier in the same round must make a DC 13 Strength save or be knocked prone.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ice soldier makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5ft., one target, *Hit:* 10 (2d6+5) cold damage.

IRE OF THE MOUNTAIN

3rd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (a piece of coal partially burnt in the shadow of Demon Mountain)

Duration: Instantaneous

Target one metal object you can see within range. Tendrils of blistering air writhe towards their intended victim. Any creature holding or wearing the object must make a Dexterity saving throw. If it succeeds, the target takes 1d8 fire damage and the spell has no further effect. If the creature fails, the targeted object melts, destroying it. When the object melts, the creature takes 4d8 fire damage if it is wearing the object, or 2d8 fire damage if it is holding the object. If the object is not held or worn by a creature, it automatically fails the Dexterity saving throw. This spell cannot target magical objects.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, target one additional object for each spell slot level above 3rd.

KISS OF THE SUCCUBUS

5th-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: S

Duration: Instantaneous

You kiss a willing creature or one you have charmed or held spellbound through spells or abilities such as *dominate person* or Lustful Gaze (see the Lust domain). The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw. A creature takes 5d10 psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken; this reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d10 for each spell slot level above 5th.

LIFE DRAIN

6th-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 90 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

With a snarled word of Void Speech, you create a swirling vortex of purple energy. Choose a point you can see within range. Creatures within 15 feet of the point take 10d6 necrotic damage, or half damage with a successful Constitution saving throw. For each creature damaged by the spell, you can choose one other creature within range, including yourself, that is not a construct or undead. The secondary targets regain hit points equal to half the necrotic damage you rolled.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 7th level or higher, the vortex's damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 6th.

LIVING SHADOWS

5th-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 minute

You whisper sibilant words of Void Speech that cause shadows to writhe with unholy life. Choose a point you can see within range. Writhing shadows spread out in a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on that point, grasping at creatures in the area. A creature that starts its turn in the area or that enters the area for the first time on its turn must make a successful Strength saving throw or be restrained by the shadows. A creature that starts its turn restrained by the shadows must make a successful Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.

A restrained creature can use its action to make a Strength or Dexterity check (its choice) against your spell save DC. On a success, it frees itself.

LOCATE RED PORTAL

3rd-level divination

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes.

For the duration, you can sense the presence of any dimensional portals within range and whether they are one-way or two-way. If you sense a portal using this spell, you can use your action to peer through the portal to determine its destination. You gain a glimpse of the area at the other end of the shadow road. If the destination is not somewhere you have previously visited, you can make a DC 25 Intelligence (Arcana, History or Nature—whichever is most relevant) check to determine to where and when the portal leads.

LOVESICK

4th-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 90 feet

Components: V, S, M (a handful of red rose petals)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

This spell affects creatures' minds causing them to behave unpredictably, as they randomly experience the full gamut of emotions of someone who has fallen head over heels in love. Each creature in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on a point you choose within range must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw when you cast this spell or be affected by it.

An affected target can't take reactions and must roll 1d10 at the start of each of its turns to determine its behavior for that turn.

d10	Behavior
1–3	The creature spends its turn moping like a lovelorn teenager – it doesn't move or take actions.
4–5	The creature bursts into tears, takes the Dash action, and uses all of its movement to run off in a random direction. To determine the direction, roll 1d8 and assign a direction to each die face.
6	The creature uses its action to remove one item of clothing or piece of armor. Each round spent removing pieces of armor reduces its AC by 1.
7–8	The creature drops anything it is holding in its hands and passionately embraces a randomly determined creature. Treat this as a grapple attempt which uses the Attack action.
9	The creature flies into a jealous rage and uses its action to make a melee attack against a randomly determined creature.
10	The creature can act and move normally.

At the end of each of its turns, an affected target can make a Wisdom saving throw. If it succeeds, this effect ends for that target.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the radius of the sphere increases by 5 feet for each slot level above 4th.

MADDENING WHISPERS

2nd-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 minute

You whisper a string of Void Speech toward a target that can hear you. The target must succeed on a Charisma saving throw or be incapacitated. While incapacitated by this spell, the target's speed is 0 and it can't benefit from increases to its speed. To maintain the effect, you must use your action on subsequent turns to continue whispering; otherwise, the spell ends. The spell also ends if the target takes damage.

MAMMON'S DUE

9th-level conjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: 500 feet

Components: V, S, M (11 gilded human skulls, 150 gold each, that are consumed by the spell)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You summon a 20-foot-radius, 20-foot-deep cylinder of burning ash and molten arms at a point on the ground that you can see within range. The ash is difficult terrain. In addition, the area is full of molten arms that seek to pull creatures deeper below the surface. If a creature enters or begins its turn in the area, it takes 10d6 fire damage and must make a Strength or Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is restrained as long as it remains in the area, or until it breaks free. A creature restrained by the molten arms can use its action to make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check against your spell save DC. If it succeeds, it is no longer restrained.

At the beginning of your turn, the molten arms attempt to pull any creatures in the area below the surface. Any creature in the ash with the restrained condition must make a Strength saving throw or be pulled 5 feet deeper into the ash. Any creature below the surface is blinded, deafened, and cannot breath.

The ash pit grows 50 feet in radius each round for the duration. The ash remains after the spell ends.

MEMENTO MORI

1st-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 round

You transform yourself into a horrifying vision of death, rotted and crawling with maggots, exuding the stench of the grave. All creatures that see you must succeed on a Charisma saving throw or be stunned until the end of your next turn.

A creature that succeeds on the saving throw is immune to further castings of this spell for 24 hours.

MOON'S RESPITE

5th-level abjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (pure water and a silver nugget worth at least 350 gp, which the spell consumes)

Duration: Instantaneous

You touch a creature who must be present for the entire casting. A beam of moonlight shines down from above, bathing the target in radiant light. The spell fails if you can't see the open sky.

If the target has any levels of shadow corruption, the moonlight burns away some of the Shadow tainting it. The creature must make a Constitution saving throw against a DC of 10 + the number of shadow corruption levels it has. The creature takes 2d10 radiant damage per level of shadow corruption and removes 1 level of shadow corruption on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage and removes 2 levels of shadow corruption on a success.

NETHER WEAPON

4th-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (ink, chalk, or some other writing medium)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You whisper in Void Speech and touch a weapon. Until the spell ends, the weapon turns pitch black, becomes magical if it wasn't before, and it does 2d6 necrotic damage in addition to its normal damage on a successful hit. A creature that takes necrotic damage from the enchanted weapon can't regain hit points until the start of your next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 4th.

OPEN RED PORTAL

9th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (a platinum ankh worth 1,000 gp)

Duration: 10 minutes

You must tap the power of a titanic or strong ley line to cast this spell (see the Ley Initiate feat in *MHH*). You open a new two-way Red Portal on the shadow road, leading to a precise location of your choosing in Midgard or on another plane of existence. If located in Midgard, this destination can be in the present day or up to 1,000 years in the past. The portal lasts for the duration.

Deities and other planar rulers can prevent portals from opening in their presence or anywhere within their domains.

PERUN'S DOOM

3rd-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

A powerful wind flows from your outstretched hand to a point you choose within range and then explodes with a low roar into a vortex of air. Each creature in a 20-foot-radius cylinder centered on that point must make a Strength saving throw. On a failed save, a target takes 3d8 bludgeoning damage, is pulled to the center of the cylinder, and then thrown 50 feet into the air. If an affected creature hits a solid obstruction, such as a stone ceiling, it takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage for each 10 feet traveled. Once the spell ends, the affected creatures fall as normal.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level of higher, increase the height that affected creatures are thrown into the air by 10 feet for each spell slot above 3rd.

PROTECTION FROM THE VOID

1st-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a small bar of silver worth 15 sp, which the spell consumes)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

Until the spell ends, one willing creature you touch has resistance to necrotic and psychic damage, and has advantage on saving throws against void spells.

RESET RED PORTAL

5th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 10 feet

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of shadow road dust which you scatter around the portal)

Duration: 1 hour

When you cast this spell, you can reset the destination of a Red Portal within range, diverting the shadow road so it leads to a location of your choosing. This destination must be in the present day. You can specify the target destination in general terms such as the City of the Fire Snakes, Mammon's home, the Halls of Avarice, or in the Eleven Hells, and anyone stepping through the portal while the spell is in effect will appear in or near that destination. If you reset the destination to the City of the Fire Snakes, for example, the portal might now lead to the first inner courtyard inside the city, or to the marketplace just outside at the GM's discretion. Once the spell's duration expires, the Red Portal resets to its original destination (50% chance) or to a new random destination (roll on the Destinations Table on page 172).

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, you can specify a destination up to 100 years in the past for each slot level beyond 5th.

RUNE OF IMPRISONMENT

3rd-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (ink)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You trace a glowing black rune in the air which streaks toward and envelopes its target. Make a ranged spell attack against the target. On a successful hit, the rune absorbs the target creature, leaving only the glowing rune hanging in the space the target occupied. The subject can take no actions while imprisoned, nor can the subject be targeted or affected by any means. Any spell durations or conditions affecting the creature are postponed until the creature is freed. A dying creature does not lose hit points or stabilize until freed.

A creature adjacent to the rune may spend a move action to attempt to disrupt its energies; doing so allows the imprisoned creature to make a Wisdom saving throw. On a success, this disruption negates the imprisonment and ends the effect. Disruption can only be attempted once per round.

SANGUINE HORROR

5th-level conjuration [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 5 feet

Components: V, S, M (a miniature dagger)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

When you cast this spell, you prick yourself with the focus, taking 1 piercing damage. The spell fails if this damage is prevented or negated in any way. From the drop of blood, you conjure a blood elemental (see *Creature Codex*). The blood elemental is friendly to you and your companions for the duration. It disappears when it's reduced to 0 hit points or when the spell ends.

Roll initiative for the elemental, which has its own turns. It obeys verbal commands from you (no action required by you). If you don't issue any commands to the blood elemental, it defends itself but otherwise takes no actions. If your concentration is broken, the blood elemental doesn't disappear, but you lose control of it and it becomes hostile to you and your companions. An uncontrolled blood elemental cannot be dismissed by you, and it disappears 1 hour after you summoned it.

SCREAMING RAY

1st-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You create a ray of psychic energy to attack your enemies. Make a ranged spell attack against a creature. On a hit, the target takes 1d4 psychic damage and is deafened until the end of your next turn. If the target succeeds on a Constitution saving throw, it is not deafened.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you create one additional ray for each slot level above 1st. You can direct the rays at one target or several.

SEAL RED PORTAL

6th-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (a gold key worth 250 gp)

Duration: Until dispelled

You seal a Red Portal or other dimensional gate within range, rendering it inoperable until this spell is dispelled. While the portal remains sealed in this way, it cannot be found with the *locate Red Portal* spell.

SHIVER

Evocation cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 ft.

Components: V, S, M (humanoid tooth)

Duration: 1 round

You fill a humanoid creature with such cold that its teeth begin to chatter and its body shakes uncontrollably. Roll 5d8; the total is the maximum hit points of a creature this spell can affect. The affected creature must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or it cannot cast a spell or load a missile weapon until the end of your next turn. Once a creature has suffered the effects of this spell, it is immune to the effects of this spell for 24 hours.

The maximum hit points you can affect increases by 4d8 when you reach 5th level (9d8), 11th level (13d8), and 17th level (17d8).

ST. BLUSEN'S REAVER SPIRIT

3rd-level enchantment [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You inspire allies to fight with the savagery of berserkers. You and allies you can see within range have: advantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws; resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons; and a +2 bonus to damage with melee weapons.

When the spell ends, all affected creatures must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or gain 1d4 levels of exhaustion.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the melee damage bonus increases by 1 for each slot level above 2nd.

ST. PARVALAS'S RISEN ROAD

4th-level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: 50 miles

Components: V, S, M (a bentwood stick)

Duration: 2–12 hours

When you cast this spell, you open a glowing portal into the Plane of Shadow. The portal remains open for 1 minute, until 10 creatures step through it, or until you collapse it (no action required). Stepping through the portal places you on a shadow road leading to a destination within 50 miles, or in a direction specified by you. The road is in ideal condition. You and your companions can travel it safely at a normal pace, but you can't rest on the road; if you stop for more than 10 minutes, the spell expires and dumps you back into the real world at a random spot within 10 miles of your starting point.

The spell expires 2d6 hours after being cast. When that happens, travelers on the road are safely deposited near their specified destination or 50 miles from their starting point in the direction that was specified when the spell was cast. Travelers never incur exhaustion no matter how many hours they spent walking or riding on the shadow road. The temporary shadow road ceases to exist; anything left behind is lost in the shadow realm. Each casting of *St. Parvalas's risen road* creates a new shadow road.

A small chance exists that a temporary shadow road might intersect with an existing shadow road, opening the possibility for meeting other travelers or monsters, or for choosing a different destination mid-journey. The likelihood is entirely up to the GM. See page 272 for further details on shadow roads.

ST. WHITESKULL'S BORROWING

3rd-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a polished vampire's fang)

Duration: 1 minute

By touching a target, you gain one sense, movement type and speed, feat, language, immunity, or extraordinary ability of the target for the duration of the spell. The target also retains the use of the borrowed ability. An unwilling target prevents the effect with a successful Constitution saving throw. The target can be a living creature or one that's been dead no longer than 1 minute; a corpse makes no saving throw. You can possess only one borrowed power at a time.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level, its duration increases to 1 hour and the target loses the stolen power for the duration of the spell.

SHROUD OF DEATH

4th-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a piece of ice)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 rounds

You call up a black veil of necrotic energy that devours the living. You draw on the life energy of all living creatures within 30 feet of you that you can see. When you cast the spell, every living creature within 30 feet of you that you can see takes 1 necrotic damage, and all those hit points transfer to you as temporary hit points. The transfer increases to 2 points per creature at the start of your second turn with the spell, 3 per creature at the start of your third turn, and so on. All living creatures you can see within 30 feet of you at the start of your turns are affected. There is no saving throw; creatures can avoid the effect by moving more than 30 feet from you or by getting out of your line of sight, but they become susceptible again if they move back into the spell's area of effect. The temporary hit points last until the spell expires.

STANCH

1st-level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 hour

The target's blood coagulates rapidly, so that a dying target stabilizes and any ongoing bleeding or wounding effect on the target ends. The target can't be the source of blood for any spell or effect that requires even a drop of blood.

STRENGTH OF THE UNDERWORLD

3rd-level necromancy [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (unholy symbol of a deity of the dead)

Duration: 1 minute

You call on the power of the dark gods of the afterlife to strengthen the target's undead energy. The spell's target has advantage on saving throws against Turn Undead while the spell lasts. If this spell is cast on a corpse that died from darakhul fever, the corpse gains a +5 bonus on its roll to determine whether it rises as a darakhul (see *Tome of Beasts*).

THROES OF ECSTASY

3rd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (a hazel or oak wand)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Choose a humanoid that you can see within range. The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become overcome with sexual euphoria, rendering them incapacitated for the duration. The creature automatically fails Wisdom saving throws, and attack rolls against the target have advantage. At the end of each of its turns, the target can make another Constitution saving throw against the spell. On a success, the spell ends on the target and the creature gains a level of exhaustion. If the spell runs for the full minute, the creature gains three levels of exhaustion when it ends.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, you can target one additional humanoid for each slot level above 3rd. The humanoids must be within 30 feet of each other when you target them.

TIMELY DISTRACTION

2nd-level evocation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 25 feet

Components: V, S, M (a handful of sand or dirt thrown in the air)

Duration: 3 rounds

You call forth a swirling, crackling wave of constantly shifting pops, flashes, and swept-up debris. This chaos can confound one creature. If the target creature fails a Wisdom saving throw, roll 1d4 and consult the following table to determine the result. An affected creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success. Otherwise, the spell expires after 3 rounds.

1d4	Effect
1	Blinded
2	Stunned
3	Deafened
4	Prone

TUNDRA-TOUCHED

8th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: self

Components: V, S,

Duration: 1 minute

Your physiology becomes similar to that of a creature born in the arctic cold of the tundra. You gain immunity to cold damage, are unaffected by conditions that cause snow blindness or hypothermia, and can move across icy surfaces without hindrances. In addition, you gain vulnerability to fire and your melee and natural weapon attacks deal an extra 2d6 cold damage on a hit for the duration of the spell.

VISAGE OF MADNESS

4th-level enchantment [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

When you cast this spell, your face momentarily becomes that of a demon lord, frightful enough to drive enemies mad. Every foe that's within 30 feet of you and that sees you must make a Wisdom saving throw. A creature that fails claws savagely at its eyes, doing (1d6 + the creature's Strength modifier) piercing damage, is stunned until the end of its next turn, and is blinded for 1d4 rounds. A creature that rolls maximum damage against itself (a 6 on the d6) is blinded permanently.

VITAL MARK

3rd-level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 10 min.

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: 24 hours

You perform a ritual that marks one unattended magic item (including weapons and armor) with a clearly visible stain of your blood. The exact appearance of the bloodstain is up to you. The item's magical abilities don't function for anyone else as long as the bloodstain remains on it. For example, a *+1 flaming longsword* with a vital mark functions as a nonmagical longsword in the hands of anyone but the caster, but it still functions as a *+1 flaming longsword* for the caster who placed the bloodstain on it. A *wand of magic missiles* would be no more than a stick in the hands of anyone but the vital mark's caster.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher on the same item for 28 consecutive days, the effect becomes permanent until dispelled.

VOID RIFT

9th-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 300 feet

Components: V, S, M (a black opal carved with a void glyph worth 500 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You speak a hideous string of Void Speech that leaves your mouth bloodied, causing a rift into absolute nothingness to tear open. The rift takes the form of a 10-foot-radius sphere, and it forms around a point you can see within range. The area within 40 feet of the sphere's outer edge becomes difficult terrain as the void tries to draw everything into itself. All creatures that start their turns within 40 feet of the sphere or that enter that area for the first time on their turn must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be pulled 15 feet toward the rift. Creatures that start their turn in contact with the rift or that come into contact with it for the first time on their turn take 8d10 necrotic damage. Creatures inside the rift are blinded and deafened. Unattended objects within 40 feet of the rift are drawn 15 feet toward it at the start of your turn, and take damage as creatures.

While concentrating on the spell, you take 2d6 necrotic damage at the end of your turn.

VOID STRIKE

3rd-level void magic

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 90 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

With a short phrase of Void Speech, you gather writhing darkness around your hand. When you cast the spell, and as an action on subsequent turns, you can unleash a bolt of darkness at a target within range. Make a ranged spell attack. If your target is in dim light or darkness, you have advantage on the roll. On a hit, the target takes 5d8 necrotic damage and is frightened of you until the start of your next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast the spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 3rd.

VOMIT TENTACLES

2nd level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a piece of a tentacle)

Duration: 5 rounds

Your jaws distend and dozens of thin, slimy tentacles emerge from your mouth to grasp and bind your opponents. Make a melee spell attack against a foe within 15 feet of you. On a hit the target takes (2d6 + your Strength modifier) bludgeoning damage and is grappled (escape DC = your spell save DC). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and it takes (2d6 + your Strength modifier) bludgeoning damage at the start of each of your turns. You can grapple only one creature at a time.

The tentacles can be attacked to free a grappled opponent. Their armor class equals yours. If they take (5 + your Constitution modifier) slashing damage from a single attack, enough tentacles are severed to free a grappled opponent. Severed tentacles are replaced by new ones at the start of your turn. Damage done to the tentacles doesn't affect your hit points.

While the spell is in effect, you are incapable of speech and can't cast spells with verbal components.

WEAPON OF BLOOD

1st-level transmutation [blood]

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of iron shavings)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

When you cast this spell, you inflict 1d4 slashing damage on yourself that can't be healed until after the blade created by this spell is destroyed or the spell ends. The trickling blood transforms into a dagger of red metal that functions as a *+1 dagger*.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level, the self-inflicted wound deals 3d4 slashing damage and the spell produces a *+2 dagger*. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level, the self-inflicted wound deals 6d4 slashing damage and the spell produces a *+2 dagger of wounding*. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 9th level, the self-inflicted wound does 9d4 slashing damage and the spell produces a *+3 dagger of wounding*.

WINTER'S RADIANCE

6th-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 400 feet (30-foot cube)

Components: V, S, M (a piece of polished glass)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

When you cast this spell, the piercing rays of a day's worth of sunlight reflecting off of fresh snow blankets the area. Creatures caught in the spell's area of effect must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or suffer disadvantage on ranged attacks and Wisdom (Perception) checks for the duration of the spell. In addition, affected creatures suffer such hampered vision that foes they target are treated as having three-quarters cover.

WORD OF MISFORTUNE

Void magic cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute.

You hiss a word of Void Speech. Choose one creature you can see within range. The next time the creature makes a saving throw during the spell's duration, it must roll a d4 and subtract the result from the total of the saving throw. The spell then ends.

WRITHING ARMS

1st-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 10 feet

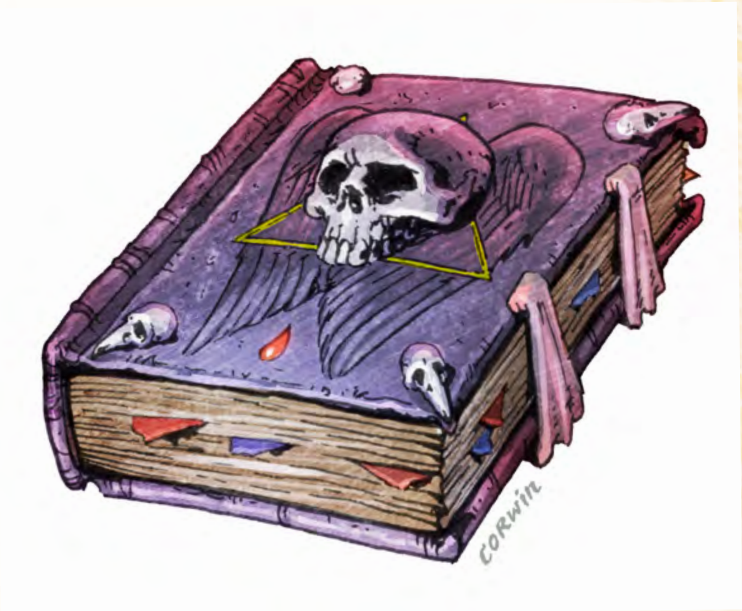
Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Your arms become constantly writing tentacles. For the duration of this spell, you can use your action to make a melee spell attack against any target within range. The target takes 1d10 necrotic damage and is grappled (escape DC is your spell save DC). If the target does not escape your grapple, you can use your action on each subsequent turn to deal 1d10 necrotic damage to the target automatically.

Although you control the tentacles, they make it difficult to manipulate items. You cannot wield weapons or hold objects, including material components, while under the effects of this spell.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the damage you deal with your tentacle attack increases by 1d10 for each slot level above 1st.



TWENTY ENCOUNTER TABLES FOR MIDGARD AND THE PLANES

Stretching from the shores of the Western Ocean to the eastern Mharoti Empire, and the Northlands to Nuria Natal, the Midlands teem with adventure.

CROSSROADS REGION

As the River Argent flows into the Middle Sea, Zobeck, the Ironcrags, and Perunalia form the beating heart of the Midlands, serving as the gateway of trade.

d8	Encounter
1	Wandering the alleys of Zobeck, a **shadow fey duelist** (ToB) looks for a fight.
2	Newly transformed, a **gearforged templar** (ToB) seeks a lost gear mage in Runkelstad.
3	Shepherding a team of **dogmoles** (ToB), a **graveslayer dwarf** (CC) travels overland to Templeforge Canton.
4	Two **clockwork hounds** and a **clockwork huntsman** (ToB) escort a fugitive back from Cronep
5	In a sacked canton, a **derro shadow paladin** (ToB) riding a **dogmole juggernaut** (ToB) stalks scavengers.
6	Three **Fellforged** (ToB) pursue a darakhul raid north from Grisal, trying to rescue captives.
7	Traveling down the Argent, a **kobold alchemist** and a **junk shaman** (CC) take goods to Perunalia.
8	**Roachling scouts** (CC) Àride ahead of a caravan bound for Zobeck, preparing an ambush.

REALMS OF DORNIG AND ARBONESSE

Dreaming heirs to the departed elven Empire of Valera, Dornig and Arbonnesse shine as a beacon of the grandeur and sophistication that was and could be.

d8	Encounter
1	Local villagers talk over ales about a magical **white stag** (CC) recently spotted nearby.
2	A **Deathsworn elf** (CC) uncovers an old cache of military gear left buried near x
3	Uncovered by peasants scallenging cut stone, a **deathwisp** (ToB) haunts its unmarked grave.
4	Seeking a distant relative near Jozht, a **shadowfey enchantress** (ToB) terrifies a pub common room for the night
5	Serving as the local sheriff, a **far darrig** (ToB) reminisces at market about past glories.
6	Three **lorelei** (ToB) lure travelers to a watery death at a ford near Reywald
7	Exiting the Shadow roads near Thorn, a **dream squire** (CC) heads for the Imperatrix's winter chalet.
8	A **green knight of the woods** (CC) holds a bridge over the Neurabon River, challenging anyone wishing to cross.

Inscrutable and massive, the forest looms as an ageless canopy drapes everything in heavy, lurking shadow. The Margreve knows secrets and Baba Yaga seeks to learn them.

d8	Encounter
1	Near a silver mine at the edge of the Black Hills, an **ala** (ToB) steals kobolds.
2	At a holiday fair in Spitoaks Crossing, an **alseid** (ToB) and **erina** argue arrowhead prices.
3	Formed by a lightning strike, a **sap demon** (ToB) attempts to possess a victim in Briarblack Hill.
4	Four **iron ghouls** (ToB) and their **lich hounds** (ToB) ride hunting peasants.
5	An angry **child of the briar** (ToB) releases **sutureflies** (ToB) at a woodcutter's camp.
6	Perched over the Grandfather's Tears river, a **rusalka** (ToB) gossips murderously with a **vila** (ToB).
7	One of **Baba Yaga's knights** (ToB) rides the Northern Road, hunting a Neimheim gnome
8	Waking from a long sleep, a **zmey** (ToB) arrives in Wolfridge, demanding all the livestock.

BLOOD KINGDOM OF MORGAU AND KRAKOVA

The Shroudeaters sit on thrones of sorrow, while immortal King Lucan crafts a bloody new nation with miserable peasant levies, ghoulish mercenaries, and hungry vampire lords.

d8	Encounter
1	A company of **dhampir** (CC) and their **commander** (CC) travel to Lodezig to discuss strategy.
2	Dispatched by a princely master, a **vampiric knight** (CC) chases a Krakovan renegade towards Wallenbirg.
3	**Darakhul ghouls** (ToB) arrive to clear a skirmish battlefield of the dead, ignoring the villagers.
4	Riding north, a warband of **ghost knights** (ToB) go to scout the defenses of Skogarholm.
5	Leading a corpse-laden **carrion beetle** (ToB), an **Imperial ghoul** (ToB) heads for Realms Subterranean.
6	Seeking a dangerous prey, a **shadowfey hunter** (ToB) stalks vampire spawn in Gybick
7	Rumors of a passing red hag infuriate a local **mavka** (ToB), who organizes active hunts.
8	Holding court in Bratislor, a **vampire patrician** (CC) issues orders to their collected progeny over an awful blood feast.

NORTHLANDS

Bonfires burn warm against Boreas' icy breath, surrounded by songs of old or brash tales of glory. Midgard's fate rests on the edge of a reaver's axe.

d8	Encounter
1	Angered by thieves, a **hagbui** (ToB) attacks anyone who wanders too close until sated with gold.
2	A dozen **trollkin reavers** (ToB) gather in Amberhall, preparing to raid Vadim shipping.
3	Answering a **bearfolk Chieftain's** (CC) call, six **bearfolk** (ToB) escort a cub to the Linnorm House.
4	Descending Wotan's Tree, a **ratatosk warlord** (CC) travels for Huldramose, bearing a royal message.
5	After an attack by frost giants, a **valkyre** (ToB) arrives to claim the dead for Valhalla.
6	A **rime worm** (ToB) moves into a local mine, claiming the tunnels as its lair.
7	Leading an attack in Wolfheim, a **thursir giant** (ToB) attempts carrying off an armful of hogs.
8	As a Jotun attacks Gifrvagga, rituals summon ancestral **einherjar** (ToB) to defend the community.

SOUTHLANDS

Towering dunes, caravans laden with salt, and both skulking gnolls as well as prowling nkosi await travelers in lands ruled by sorcerer god-pharoahs and potent wind spirits.

d8	Encounter
1	Captives try to escape from a **salt devil** (ToB) before they arrive at Ghatazi.
2	2 A lazy **temple cat** (ToB) lingers near the entrance to a Bastet Shrine for offerings.
3	3 In Horem-gatra, an **al-aeshma genie** (ToB) delivers figs to their master's love.
4	4 A chain of **giant ants** (ToB) raids the grainery near Herak.
5	5 Trespassing in the Sultan of Siwal's gardens a **serpopard** (ToB) gorges on peacocks.
6	6 A work detail of five leonine **ushabti** (ToB) excavate a canal along the Lion Road in Tes-Luria.
7	7 Demanding any visitors pay a toll, a tribe of **blemmyes** (ToB) illegally claim an oasis near Saph-Saph
8	8 Waiting along the Tamasheq Trail, a trio of **bouda** (ToB) prepare an ambush.

DRAGON EMPIRE

Soaring upon the horizon like a great, scaly storm, the Mharoti Empire marches for plunder and territory, conquering enemies, and facing even greater dangers in the East.

d8	Encounter
1	Traveling near the Ishadian border, a **lammasu** (ToB) fights a **wyvern knight** (CC) and **war wyvern** (CC).
2	Three **dragonborn edjet** (CC) escort a **dragonborn elementalist** (CC) to Rhaga.
3	**Light dragonborn cavalry** (CC) ride south to raid Nurian sandship traffic in the Sarklan Desert.
4	A patrol of **elite koboldi** (CC) collect taxes from protesting merchants on the road to Efisis.
5	Riding two abreast, a unit of **dragonborn heavy cavalry** (CC) go to reinforce a Rumelan fort.
6	Four **gnoll slavers** (CC) scour the hills for refugees north of Mardas Adamat.
7	Escorting tribute barges to Uqmal, a **sea dragon** (ToB) lounges in a shallow sandbar.
8	Waiting in a village, a **ravenfolk Scout** (ToB) prepares to march with auxiliaries for the East.

SEVEN CITIES

Human nobility clothed in elvish legacy on the shores of the Middle Sea, the Septime region raises warfare to an artform against foes at home and abroad.

d8	Encounter
1	Carousing through Trombei pubs, some **elfmarked humans** (CC) sing loudly while looking for a gambling den.
2	Lingering outside Kammae, an **empusa**(ToB2) attempts to capture messengers and spies.
3	Leading a mob, a **blood hag** (ToB) takes a captured ring mage to public execution in Savoyne.
4	Rummaging through a scroll market on Missala, a **red hag** (ToB) seeks secrets about Talitheos.
5	Riding her **gerridae** (ToB) through Capelon, a **moon mistress** (CC) heads to the docks.
6	Mad with hunger, a **ghost boar** (CC) breaks loose, terrorizing a village outside Kammae.
7	A rogue **blood elemental** (CC) hunts a rival of Marena's cult in the alleys of Friula.
8	In Valera, a **battle mage** (CC) joins a mustering company of mercenaries for War Season.

BEMMEA, BARSALLA, AND THE WASTES

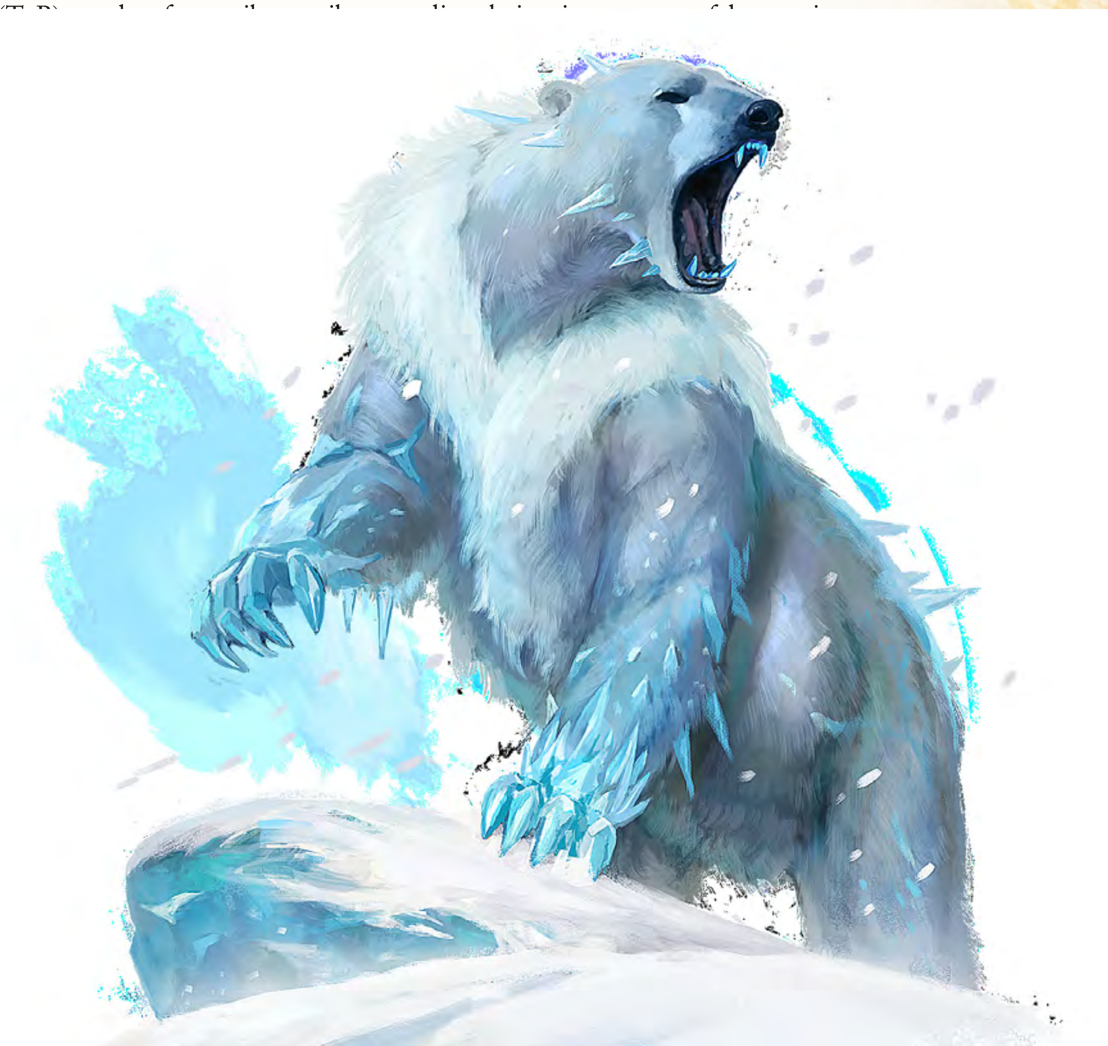
Amid the wreckage of the Great Mage Wars, stand wondrous spires and towering monstrosities. Brave explorers, potent wizards, and madness abounds in this blasted, sometimes beautiful landscape.

d8	Encounter
1	Sold for menageries, four **behtu** (ToB) angrily rattle their cages in a Barsalla market.
2	At a ford of the Leukos river, two **eleionomae** (ToB) lure crossers into dangerous waters.
3	In the Fellmire Swamp, two **bagiennik** (ToB) chase an alchemist and their rickety boat.
4	Three **morphoi** (ToB) investigate a crumbling temple of Nethus north of Goatshead.
5	**Dust Goblins** (ToB) and their **Chieftain** (CC) ride **j'ba fofi spiders** (ToB) beneath a Great Old One.
6	A **spider drake** (CC) uses a **rotting wind** (ToB) to detour travelers on the Mage Road.
7	Two **pillars of Uxloon** (CC) guard the path to a **gug** (ToB) lairing in a ruined watchtower.
8	A **horakh** (ToB) hunts pilgrims on the road to the Seat of Mavros.

ROTHENIAN PLAIN

The vast and rolling grassland sea hosts a multitude of fiercely independent centaurs and rolling wagon cities of Kariv, all beneath the Lord of Demon Mountain's gaze.

d8	Encounter
1	A **ravenfolk Doomcroaker**
2	Foraging for its nest, a hung near a rocky outcropping.
3	Searching for recruits and p **Chieftain** (CC) and four cen
4	A **scribe devil** (TOB2) carrie contract back to its master o
5	Six **gnoll Havoc Runners** (steppes, looking for Kariv w
6	In the southern Rothenian, four **shadhavar** (ToB) harass
7	Hunting alone near Vadim, **ursa polaris** (CC) seeks mea hibernating for the summer.
8	In a bruise colored depressio between hills, a **voiding** (To lingers, spreading corruptio



HAUNTED LANDS AND JUNGLES OF CARNESSA

Lying in the shadow of the immense Wall, haunted giants and flesh-eating plants dominate this mysterious region; both well fed on foolish explorers.

d8	Encounter
1	Near a cluster of large boulders, a pair of **giant vampire bats** (CC) feed on deer.
2	A train of **fungal acid ants** (CC) empty an abandoned giant's food stores.
3	Having caught an elfmarked expedition sleeping, a swarm of **anophiloi** (CC) drink until swollen.
4	Two **children of Yggdrasil** (CC) maintain a Carnessan greenhouse near the Wall to draw songbirds.
5	Nestled into the rotting bulk of a dead giant
6	A **forest emperor** (ToB2) begins to emerge f wasteland dragon corpse.
7	At the edge of a Balinor desert oasis, a **vesicu**
8	Possessed by an ancestor spirit, a **haunted g**

MHAROTI HIGHLANDS AN MHAROTI-ISHADIAN LOW

An old realm which claims an older divine heritag future of Ishadia depends on a brutal war with the although hope lies to the east.

d8	Encounter
1	**Heavy dragonborn cavalry** (ToB) escort a r delegation from Dornig to Harkesh.
2	A patrol of **elite kobolds** (CC) riding **war os** rides for Prezhan in Gizmiri.
3	Marching eastwards, a band of **red tusked o** bully a merchant for a pony.
4	Picking across the remains of a Xirdalan bat a **Herald of Undeath** (CC) seeks corpses.
5	Ishadian troops and a **gugalanna** (CC) ambu a Mharoti **blood mage** (CC) near Siyaz.
6	In the sky overhead, an **anzu** (ToB2) fights w **wasteland dragon** (CC) over a camel.
7	Two **sanddrift drakes** (ToB2) linger on the Sarkland Road south of Harrapo-Dar, waiting for an ambush.
8	Monitoring repairs on the road from Ashada Uqmal, a detachment of **dragonborn edjet** (

MIDDLE SEAS & RUBY DESPOTATE

The fabric of commerce in the Midlands, merchants, monsters, navies, and pirates all ply its waves, and greatly influence the cultures whose shores they kiss.

d8	Encounter
1	A Trombei merchant vessel carries mastic for Laksor, captained by a **battle mage** (CC).
2	A pack of eight **wharflings** (ToB) stalks a pier at port, aggressively looking for a meal.
3	Enroute to Efsis, a **sea dragon** (ToB) escorts three tribute ships loaded with edjet initiates (ToB2).
4	A ship goes to Caeltornash with **War Chaplains** (CC) to begin the pilgrimage for the Seat of Mavros.
5	**Gnoll slavers** (CC) pack the decks of a trireme sailing from Reth-Saal.
6	Flying Kyprion colors, a sailing vessel carries minotaur **labyrinth keepers** (CC) on mission to Cindass.
7	Loaded with grain for Valera, a royal vessel from Per-Xor sails with a **shabti** (ToB) crew and a **Cleric of the Brew** (CC).
8	A **mithril dragon** (ToB) wheels far overhead, searching for wrecks.

NIEDER STRAIT

The cold and rough passage between the Bemmean Shallows and dark fjords of the Northlands, it also holds the forbidding, ice-bound prison of Loki's Isle.

d8	Encounter
1	Five **einherjar** (ToB) guard a slowly burning funeral boat sailing for the World's Edge.
2	Between a close trio of rocky islands, four **thursir giants** (ToB) play catch with stones.
3	On a drifting flow, an **Ice Maiden** (ToB) calls passersby for false rescue.
4	**Snow giants** (CC) carve a great longship out of an iceberg to raid shipping.
5	Dwelling at the bottom of a clear harbor, a band of five **vaettir** (ToB) wait for visitors to stop for water.
6	A **lindwurm** (ToB) picks through the rotting wreckage of a Bemmean merchant vessel beached on a sandy island.
7	A roaring pod of **mahoru** (ToB) pursue a swamped whaling ship.
8	**Trollkin reavers** (ToB) pack a longboat racing to capture a slower sailing Dornish merchant.

PARTHIA & BELDESTAN

Realms of shared customs but separate geography and different fates, the paths of these two nations diverged long ago. One serves Mharot, the other stares into the void.

d8	Encounter
1	A **kobold wizard** (CC) and its **swolbold** (CC) retinue travel to visit the Elemental College.
2	Preparing a sacrifice in an unnamed town near Kukhiss, **void cultists** (CC) lead chained victims.
3	Three **shadhavar** (ToB) pursue a small caravan carrying silversmithing goods from Galna to Mardis.
4	From a sundrenched outcropping, a **simurgh** (CC) guards a lonely watering hole between Mardis and Qaen.
5	Riding the high currents from Mardis to Kaa'Nesh, a **wind dragon** (ToB) hunts centaur raiders for loot.
6	Spreading its corrupting tendrils, a **voidling** (ToB) despoils a secluded glen near Ur-Trakhan.
7	Southeast of the Towers of Khubara, a **Darakhul captain** (ToB2) and **ghoul spy** (ToB2) exchange reports.
8	North of the Lumera Forest, two **centaur chieftains** (CC) trade and ally their herds before raiding.

SHADOW ROADS

Whether accessed by shadow fey gate, ancient Caerlmarathan ritual, or Nurian Red Portal, these causeways trace the ley lines and speed travelers to their destinations.

d8	Encounter
1	At a sealed portal, a **voidwracked mage** (CC) and three **void speakers** (CC) attempt to breach the ward.
2	Twelve **folk of leng** (ToB) tend a caravan of ashen grey captives with bright crimson eyes.
3	Prowling along the shoulder of the road, three **hounds of tindalos** (CC) stalk humans.
4	A **shadow fey knight of the road** (CC) entertains a **pattern dancer** (CC) at a crossroads.
5	Bartering for soul gems with a hag, a **spawn of alquam** (ToB2) dominates the causeway.
6	In a forested stretch, a **duskthorn dryad** (ToB) and **vine troll skeleton** (ToB) ambush travelers.
7	Hiding as the ashes in an old campsite's fire ring, a **bonepowder ghoul** (ToB) lies in wait.
8	Rummaging through a shattered merchant's wagon, a **gug** (ToB) messily consumes corpses.

SUMMERLANDS

Bright and glorious realms of the sidhe, elves and other faeries, where the hosts of Valera retired when Midgard lost its shine and pleased them no longer.

d8	Encounter
1	The **Lord of the Hunt** (ToB) chases a **firebird** (ToB) through brambles and brush.
2	At a river crossing, a **lorelei** (ToB) and three **eelhounds** (ToB) charge travelers a toll.
3	A small group of **alseid** (ToB) stalk game across a meadow of softly weeping blooms.
4	Near a watery portal to an Arbonnesse miller's pond, a **vine drake** (ToB2) ambushes unwary visitors.
5	Marching briskly, three **elvish enchanters** (CC) bring news from the Holly King to the River Court.
6	A cruel **shellycoat** (ToB) captures **lantern dragonettes** (ToB) in a secluded twilight glen.
7	Enjoying a festive repast among tents, a band of elvish **Servants of the Vine** (CC) tell tales of Valera past.
8	Possessed by an ancestor spirit, a **haunted giant** (CC) attempts to replace scattered bones in a dolmen.

WESTERN SEAS

Wine dark and mysterious, the frontier of the setting sun remains enigmatic and unpredictable; its untethered islands adrift in uncharted currents. Somewhere, a forgotten goddess of memory weeps.

d8	Encounter
1	A **light dragon** (CC) flies from island to ship to settlement, trading goods from enormous saddlebags.
2	Cruising the open seas, a **carnivorous ship** (ToB2) trolls for prey.
3	A **morphoi** (ToB) takes a human guise before entering a tavern in Barsalla, looking for work.
4	In a drifting lifeboat full of clean-picked bones, three hungry **behtu** (ToB) warily eye each other.
5	A **titan** (ToB) emerges from the waves to seek a lost peer on a random island.
6	On business for the Bloodless Queen, a **virtuoso lich** (ToB2) seeks the isle of Morphoi.
7	The **Isonade** (ToB) surfaces with a great breaching splash, swamping several vessels in its wake.
8	While it sleeps near Umbrasca's harbor, several **shadow fey poisoners** (CC) explore the **Zaratan** (ToB).

UNDERWORLD

Honeycombing Midgard with tunnels and galleries, the Realms Subterranean lie in the darkness beneath the road and wilderness alike, where hungry fangs await any body delivered to them.

d8	Encounter
1	A darakhul **iron ghoul** (ToB) and several **lichhour** hunt escaped slaves from Gonderif.
2	Leading a caravan of pack lizards, a **derro shadow** brings trade to an outpost outside Fretlock.
3	**Pech** (CC) and a **Stonemaster** (CC) explore aband Imperial iron mines, looking for overlooked ore.
4	Scavenging drow ruins, a **dwarvish ring mage** (C and two **dogmole juggernauts** (ToB) excavate.
5	A delegation of **deathcap myconid** (ToB) take a message to kobold allies in Lillefor.
6	Near the Forest of Forgetting, a **cave dragon** (ToB waits to ambush silver miners confused by spores.
7	Duergar and **carrion beetles** (ToB) bring mushroo lumber to Iddoret, to trade with aboleth.
8	Searching for a clutchmate's lost whelp in the Marshlight Caverns, three **kobold trapsmiths** (C

YGGDRASIL

The great World Tree rises through the multiverse, spre intertwining saplings to pierce and cradle the other pla Niflheim to Midgard to Asgard and into the Void.

d8	Encounter
1	Two **ratatosk** (ToB) thrill-seekers invite passersby wingsuits and leap from the World Tree with them
2	A crew of **kallikantzaros** (CC) work with saws to a popular branchway leading to the Marketplace.
3	**Ravenfolk** (ToB) pursue the planar traveler who s
4	A **void dragon** (ToB) challenges travelers to a contest of wit to win the prize of a potted Yggdrasil sapling
5	**Spiders of Leng** (ToB) hunt for new slaves to force into freeing their voidship run aground in the branches.
6	A band of **Valkyrie** (ToB) hunts for a party of **Einherjar** (ToB) who seek to invade Midgard.
7	On the path to the Eyrie, a **two-headed eagle** (CC) permits access only to those with lore to share.
8	Guarded by lesser giants, a **jotun** (ToB) hangs inverted from a mighty branch, seeking to supplant Wotan.

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